

LISTENING TO THE MATTOLE: LESSONS IN BIOREGIONALISM, CANNABIS,  
AND CAPITALISM FROM A NORTHERN CALIFORNIA COMMUNITY

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## ABSTRACT

### LISTENING TO THE MATTOLE: LESSONS IN BIOREGIONALISM, CANNABIS, AND CAPITALISM FROM A NORTHERN CALIFORNIA COMMUNITY

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In the United States, from the 1960s through the 1970s, nearly a million Americans left urban areas to establish themselves in rural environments; this exodus is now known as the back-to-the-land movement. Nestled in the mountains of Northern California, along a capricious river, and surrounded by natural beauty, the Mattole Valley became home to many of these back-to-the-land immigrants. Seasoned in the social and cultural movements of Berkeley and San Francisco during the 1960s, the “new settlers” transformed the social and environmental landscape of southern Humboldt County as they integrated into its rural communities. The Mattole Valley offers a unique look at the ongoing negotiation between people and place by revealing the intersections between bioregional philosophy, cannabis agriculture, and modern capitalism.

Using constructivist grounded theory, my research investigates the experiences of the new settlers and the forces that motivated and affected their lives. I complement this theoretical approach with a phenomenological lens to explore the lived experiences of the participants in this movement and to inform my epistemological foundation. This study incorporates a mixed-method approach by interweaving oral history, semi-structured interviews, participant observation, document analysis, and archival research.

Through my research, I have found a strong presence of bioregional philosophy in the initial motivations for this settlement and in the persistence of the community. My results identify foundational elements of bioregionalism, as well as the implications of capitalism by way of cannabis agriculture. Based on the community efforts to bridge ideological differences and negotiate the tenets of bioregionalism and capitalism, I argue that the Mattole serves as a guide for communities around the globe. In the process of compiling the stories and lived experiences of the residents, I unfold a story that carries lessons from the back-to-the-land movement into the future.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It was on the banks of the Mattole River, seated around a campfire, that my graduate cohort began inventing nicknames for one another. As we were starting on a journey together, our names became our camp names, our “Mattole names,” our community names in this new environment. Padded with laughter and jokes, each member of the cohort received a name and these names have followed us through the graduate program. During each presentation of this research, I have used the name Wind Willow. My family name is Nicola Walters; however, I have found that Wind Willow is reflective of my research journey. I have chosen to use the name Wind Willow on my thesis in an effort to encourage the imagery of the earth and the strength of natural processes each time someone references my work. I thank my graduate cohort for the name, the laughter, support, and friendship on this path and into the future.

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“What is the most damage I can do, given my biography, abilities, and commitments, to the racial order and rule of capital?” (Joel Olson, 1967– 2012)

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Finally, thank you to the residents of the Mattole. Thank you for sharing your lives with me, for opening your homes and history to me, and for the time you gave to an outsider who just wanted to know more. I am inspired by all of you, not because of a glorified notion of the community, but because I see us as all grappling with the same questions. Thank you for your insights; it is my hope that this thesis can be a tool for you in the continuation of your journey, or at the very least, a celebration of you.

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## INTRODUCTION

“Be attentive; listen to what the planet is saying; it’s alive, all of it” (House, 1999).

“To save our salmon, we are going to have to save the world” (Simpson, 1999).

In the 1960s, the culture wars marked a time in America's consciousness when dominant society was challenged in movements across the nation. One iconic location for these events was the San Francisco Bay Area. In this collision of cultural ideas, participants began to imagine a new way of living; they spoke out against the military, government, and state institutions, ultimately shaping a generation. However, this movement did not end. The refugees of this countercultural era found themselves dispersing across North America in a new chapter of engagement called the back-to-the-land movement. While the lives of the back-to-the-landers, or “new settlers,” have been investigated in many different contexts, the movement itself has been largely obscured. Sociologist Sharon Ann Weaver concluded, “If this historical movement appears in larger histories of the era, it is often at the margin, and treated with a degree of condescension” (Weaver, 2013: 10). Yet, this mass migration of new settlers has significant implications for dominant society in illuminating the variables motivating urban departure, as well as the forces that brought them back in.

This study of new settlers follows their reinhabitation of a Northern California community, referred to as “the Mattole Valley” or “the Mattole.” While this is but one progression of countercultural ideologies from the 1960s, it is significant because the new

settlers of the Mattole Valley incorporated bioregional philosophy through restoration work, forest defense, and community practices in a way that initially challenged the narrative of an American capitalist culture. Furthermore, the new settlers were not participants in a commune or intentional community in the Mattole, thus mandating that their lives harmonized, to a degree, with the traditional rancher community of the area.<sup>1</sup> Following the 1960s counterculture participants through their resettlement of the Mattole Valley confirms the intersections of bioregional philosophy, cannabis, and capitalism. This research project reveals the process as it occurred in the Valley and attempts to offer a historical link for the residents while providing insights for society.

Using constructivist grounded theory and a phenomenological lens, my research investigates the experiences of the new settlers in this unique region. I utilize a mix-method approach by exploring oral histories, semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and archival research. Focusing on the experiences of the new settlers brings out important discourses hidden in dominant literature. This research investigates the literature surrounding the countercultural movement, the back-to-the-land migration, the exploration and application of bioregional philosophy, and the significance of cannabis agriculture in both symbolic and tangible capacities.

While my research began with a focus on the activism of the Mattole residents, I quickly found that the term “activist” or the idea of “activism” did not adequately

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<sup>1</sup> Intentional communities are planned residential communities that are formed with the idea of people coming together to live in a particular way. Usually members share social, political, or spiritual beliefs and work to develop a high level of social cohesion and teamwork. Examples include co-housing, anarchic squatter houses, cooperative housing developments, kibbutzim, Christian activist communities, Shaker communities, and eco-villages.

describe the experiences of the Mattole residents. Most of my respondents struggled with the term or used it to describe a particular set of actions separate from the practice of homesteading. While many residents did come to the area with strong political beliefs, there was a divergence in the way that people envisioned their habitation of the Mattole Valley. I adapted my research to reflect the interpretations of the residents; however, my research was guided by the following questions:

1. What beliefs did the back-to-the-landers bring to the Valley?
2. What social movements were they connected to before settling in the Mattole?
3. What projects and initiatives did residents focus on in the Mattole?
4. How have the back-to-the-landers seen their version of activism change?
5. What influences have contributed to this transition in activism?

### Project Rationale

My justification for this project comes from both practical and personal motivations. For one, the Mattole Valley community has never been written about as a cultural focal point. Through the literature focusing on the countercultural communities of Southern Humboldt, the Mattole Valley has played a part, but has been blended into conversations which highlight the “Mateel” or “Mateel Nation”: communities of the furthest upstream reaches of the Mattole watershed joined with those of the Eel River in Southern Humboldt and Northern Mendocino counties. In recent literature, the Mattole Valley has been connected to the cannabis industry, timber, and watershed restoration,

but there has not been a focus on the countercultural identity that fertilized the Valley, nor the evolution of this movement. Second, in North America the back-to-the-landers, as a collective phenomenon, have recently seen increased media attention. Journalist Kate Daloz (2016) focused on the back-to-the-land communities of Vermont and their connection to Bernie Sanders, drawing the history of countercultural formation to contemporary politics. These studies on the lifestyles and legacies of new settlers are beginning to situate the movement in conjunction with broader political processes that have shaped the cultural landscape. Third, by incorporating the elements that have exercised pressure on the community, while focusing on the voices of the residents, I aimed to get a clearer image of these relationships, emphasizing the intersections between cultural trajectories. It is not my intention to glorify or glamorize the community, but instead present the stories of the residents as they navigate new terrain.

On a personal level, I approached this research topic as a person who is interested in social movements and believes in small communities as opportunities to reframe social, economic, and ecological relationships. I have been deeply inspired by Murray Bookchin's writings on social ecology, which have motivated many people to go back to the land. Bookchin argued, "Nearly all of our present ecological problems originate in deep-seated social problems. It follows, from this view, that these ecological problems cannot be understood, let alone solved, without a careful understanding of our existing society and the irrationalities that dominate it" (Bookchin, 2007: 19). A belief in the dialectical relationship between people and place accompanied me to Humboldt County, where I have made my home. It was here that I found myself connecting with my

community and exploring notions related to community and environmental health; quickly I stopped seeing a distinction between the two.

As people across the nation and the planet hypothesize about our future, I am reminded of sociologist Jentri Anders' (1990) insight: "The way that this community [the Mateel] has functioned provides lessons for the rest of society." While Anders wrote these words as a description of the historical juncture before industrial cannabis agriculture transformed the region, I believe this conclusion rings true today; I felt it during my interviews and while sitting on the banks of the Mattole River and beaches of the Pacific Ocean. Dwarfed by the history and expansiveness of this landscape, I believe we are being asked fundamental questions. How have institutions shaped our social and ecological environments? How do we connect over difference? How do we fit as a human species into the web of life on this planet? While this study does not answer these questions, I have felt an evolution of my own self as I explore this process, and that gives me hope as we take steps forward on this life-giving earth.

My goal in conducting this project is to pursue a more nuanced understanding of the subjective experiences of new settlers, learning from their experiences in regard to living with the human and nonhuman components of this world, while critically engaging human systems at large. I have found that approaching this topic from the viewpoint of the community – not as a location for events, a footnote reference, or a historically fragmented study of countercultural activism, but as a place that acts as a window to our own selves – has allowed me to see connections which unite our experiences.

## Definitions

1. Capitalism – A socio-economic system based on private ownership of the means of production and the exploitation of labor as an input to profit-generating expansion. Murray Bookchin provided historical analysis: “By the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the new industrial capitalist class, with its factory system and commitment to limitless expansion, had embarked on its colonization of the entire world, including most aspects of personal life. The industrial capitalists of the modern world spawned a bitterly competitive marketplace that placed a high premium on industrial expansion and the commercial power it conferred, functioning as though growth were an end in itself” (Bookchin, 2007: 42). Through these chapters I explain how capitalism is both a philosophy and a web of politically reinforced economic processes, pointing to the continued mutation of capitalism in an increasingly globalized world.
2. Dominant culture – In describing dominant culture, I am critiquing the capitalist consumer culture. Mike Carr (2005) defined the dominant cultural construct of “man” as an individualistic consumer or “homo economicus.” Homo economicus “relies on an ever increasing dependence on material (manufactured) capital accumulation for personal security and self-esteem” (Carr, 2005: 21). With ever-expanding markets, the overconsumption of homo economicus is perpetuated.
3. Community – The term *community* has been widely used and applied to very different situations. It could refer to a small-scale, close-knit group or a broader,

loosely defined organization of people (Carr, 2005). Daly and Cobb defined community using four criteria: “One, membership in the community contributes to self-identification; two, there is extensive participation by its members in the decisions by which its life is governed; three, the society as a whole takes responsibility for its members; and, four, the responsibility includes respect for the diverse individuality of its members” (as cited in Carr, 2005: 36; 1989: 172). Carr (2005) included a geographical element, which applies to my use of “community” as well. If we accept there exist two such communities, community of place and community of interest, then we can better understand the interpretation of “community” in this paper. I utilize the word with the idea that place and interests characterize the community in my research. In the Mattole Valley there is a larger place-based community, but I focus on an ideological subset of this community – the new settlers. While they are not homogenous, the manner in which they self-ascribe aligns with the proposed definition.

4. Cannabis – Aldinger (2015: 34) used the term *Cannabis* “based on a personal desire to de-stigmatize the plant by avoiding the use of terminology such as ‘marijuana,’ ‘weed,’ ‘pot,’ ‘ganja,’ etc., that conjure distinct drug-related cultural and political connotations in United States society.” Though Aldinger capitalized and italicized the word in alignment with its botanical name, I will be discussing the relationship with the plant in a social and political way that extends beyond the botanical relationship; I see no need for capitalization nor italics. I acknowledge that my use of this term positions me in a specific political frame



similar to those who discuss the plant in conjunction with medicinal uses. I also recognize that the terms used by the residents of Humboldt County, researchers, educators, and the media are competing and overlapping interpretations, reveal positionalities and involvement with the industry, and demonstrate the disjointed terrain surrounding cannabis cultivation.

5. Social movement – “a large-scale collective behavior directed toward promoting or resisting social change” (Jacob, 1997: 5).
6. Activism – drawing attention to a policy or action and working to create social or political change. Activist work might include campaigning, organizing rallies and marches, passing out information or writing about an issue, and direct action to inhibit implementation of policies or corporate development.
7. New settler – While many different terms are used to describe the refugees from the back-to-the-land movement, I predominately use “new settler” to remain consistent with the discourse surrounding the Mattole community.
8. Homesteader – For years in the United States, the word referred to a free government land program and to the people possessing the skills necessary for living off the land. Today the word *homesteading* refers to a lifestyle that promotes greater self-sufficiency. To be clear, there is a difference between a homesteader and a new settler; new settlers were part of the back-to-the-land movement and while they are homesteaders, they are a specific group of homesteaders.

9. Hippie – Commonly associated with the 1960s, the word *hippie* describes a person who participated in the counterculture movement. The participants argued that America needed new ethics “appropriate to an age characterized by never-ending global power struggles, technocracy, urbanization, environmental catastrophe, and new psychedelic chemistry” (Miller, 1991: xiv). When I use the words “counterculture participant” and “hippie,” I am talking about people who reflect these ideologies.

## BACKGROUND PART 1: THE BACK-TO-THE-LAND MOVEMENT

“Turn on, tune in, drop out” (Leary, 1967).

“The counterculture was ahead of its time, an extreme response to extremes of conformity. The response to it was a systematic overreaction, sometimes spontaneous and understandable, but too often deliberate and political, on the part of society and its Machiavellians” (Hayden, 2009: 46).

“A civilization that relentlessly destroys the living land it inhabits is not well acquainted with truth, regardless of how many supposed facts it has amassed regarding the calculable properties of its world” (Abram, 1996: 265).

### The Back-to-the-Land Movement is Deeply Rooted in American History

The capitalist paradigm of the American economy, the resulting boom and bust cycles, and the dominant cultural identity have resulted in an ongoing tension between urban, agrarian, and Indigenous approaches to land use. Ultimately, economic and social forces have inspired numerous migrations among dominant society “back to the land.” Most notably, beginning in the late 1960s and through the 1970s, approximately 900,000 people turned their backs on cities and scattered across the American countryside, while 100,000 ex-urbanites moved throughout Canada (Simmons, 1979: 194).<sup>2</sup> From California, Oregon, and British Columbia, to New Mexico, Vermont and Eastern Canada, these migrants touched down in rural communities across North America. While each person and family had their own reasons for leaving urban environments, the population

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<sup>2</sup> Simmons qualifies his data as estimates which err on the conservative side. Based on the lack of quantifiable data, these numbers are most likely low.

of settlers were mostly white, middle-class, college educated, and driven by political motivations (Anders, 1990; Brown, 2012; Corva, 2013; Daloz, 2016; Jacob, 1997). For many, the expansion of industrialism and its implications on urban society made homesteading not only a political act in protecting their independence, but one of their last viable options (Brown, 2012: 213). In contrast to back-to-the-land migrations of previous eras, the 1970s movement took form as a general consumer boycott, challenging the progression of not only the economic system, but the culture of consumption (Brown, 2012: 226). Investigating the inspiration for this massive rural resettlement illuminates historic trends and policies in American history. This chapter presents important information regarding the back-to-the-land movement, the political and social environment of the San Francisco Bay Area during the 1960s, and the manner in which the Mattole Valley became a landing place for new settlers.

Although the back-to-the-land movement is commonly described as a romantic impulse or reaction to the political environment of the 1960s, the movement itself is deeply rooted in American history (Brown, 2011; Jacob, 1997; Miller, 1999; Weaver, 2013). Migrations back to the land are tied to classic American agrarianism, linking the advocacies of Thomas Jefferson to the philosophical foundation of Henry David Thoreau (Jacob, 1997: 6). While Jefferson's advocacies were supplanted by the industrial and commercial motives of Alexander Hamilton, themes of individualism, self-sufficiency, and a connection with nature continued to influence literature and politics (Jacob, 1997: 6). As seen through the Transcendentalist movement, spirituality connected the priorities of self-reliance and nature, resulting in a social renaissance in America (Tyler, 1944).

Exemplified in *Walden*, Thoreau famously wrote of environmental ethics and the significance of nature during a two-year sojourn to the woods: “I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived” (Thoreau, 1993: 75).<sup>3</sup> While many point to these words as embodying the spiritual or romantic notions of moving back to the land, central to Thoreau’s philosophy was a critique of capitalism. Observing the tension between industrialism and nature, Thoreau argued, “If a man walk in the woods for love of them half of each day, he is in danger of being regarded as a loafer; but if he spends his whole day as a speculator, shearing off those woods and making earth bald before her time, he is esteemed an industrious and enterprising citizen. As if a town had no interest in its forests but to cut them down!” (Thoreau, 1993: 351). In connecting the philosophical and the practical, rural migration offered pragmatic and restorative properties to the American dream.

When the industrialization narrative fell short of tangible capital realities, rural reintegration would become an increasingly agreeable transition. From the late 1800s and through the early 1900s, the nation experienced a series of financial crises and an ongoing economic depression (Brown, 2011: 4). Through diverse publications, humorous and earnest, satirical and practical, Americans would be persuaded to leave cities and return to an agrarian lifestyle (Brown, 2011: 21). At this time, rural migration was not

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<sup>3</sup> For more information on the diverse literature that influenced back-to-the-land movements in American history, see: Brown, Dona. (2011). *Back-to-the-land: The Enduring Dream of Self-Sufficiency in Modern America*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin.

considered “back to something,” but instead a step towards a more financially sound future (Brown, 2011: 4). In addition to alleviating financial pressures, back-to-the-land movements offered to fulfill a type of rural consciousness that was disappearing in the wake of urbanization (Jacob, 1997: 7). Urban to rural migration would persist in waves through the 1920s and onward, influencing landmark federal policy such as Roosevelt’s New Deal (Brown, 2011: 6; Jacob, 1997: 10). Through government initiatives and literature, the flux between city centers and rural environments would leave a mark on the American cultural landscape.

When visualizing the transition between cities and rural communities, the nuclear family is usually the predominant focus and the presence of collective living developments is commonly omitted. However, central to American identity exist the traditions of communalism and bohemianism (Miller, 1999). In the 1950s, the Beat movement or the Beat Generation emerged as a post-World War II bohemian subculture, which incorporated art, literature, and communalism in socio-political opposition to bourgeois or “square” culture (van Elteren, 1999: 71). Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, and other Beat authors and poets further challenged the conformist nature of dominant society, publicly denouncing consumer capitalism (Miller, 1999: 3-4). Murray Bookchin observed the ways in which the Beat epoch incorporated environmental concern, psychedelic use, communes, a health food focus, “hip” art forms, and other cultural innovations, features more commonly associated with the 1960s (as cited in Miller, 1999: 5). These cultural and political underpinnings contributed to the budding counterculture and subsequent movement back to the land.

## The Role of the San Francisco Bay Area in the 1960s

During the iconic era referred to as “the Sixties,” the United States was undergoing a political and cultural upheaval. To name a few of the contributing factors, first, new cultural influences permeated popular culture, pointed in alternative directions by the Beats (Miller, 1999: 5). Second, the Civil Rights Movement resulted in the growing appreciation for black cultural identity, the prioritization of civil rights advocacies, and while previously associated with black musicians, the incorporation of cannabis into mainstream society through cross-cultural interaction (Miller, 1999: 6). Third, cannabis and psychedelic experimentation stimulated diversion from conformity. Last, the Vietnam War was ongoing and people were becoming politically and socially active in cities and on college campuses in response to the war effort. The intersections of these movements inspired new political and cultural formations, which would greatly define this era. One historic location for these transformations was the San Francisco Bay Area.

At the University of California Berkeley, the Free Speech Movement coalesced in response to the civil rights motivations of the student population (Cohen, R., 2014: 76-77). Their platform, which centered around the national civil rights movement and the freedom of speech campaign, developed as time went on to challenge the structure and practices of educational and political institutions. Free Speech Movement activist and scholar Mario Savio (as cited in Kitchell, 1990) famously spoke out:

There's a time when the operation of the machine becomes so odious, makes you so sick at heart, that you can't take part. You can't even passively take part. And

you've got to put your bodies upon the gears, and upon the wheels, upon the levers, upon all the apparatus, and you've got to make it stop. And you've got to indicate to the people who run it, to the people who own it, that unless you're free the machine will be prevented from working at all!

Across the bay from Berkeley, on the streets of San Francisco, hippies further exposed the chasm between dominant culture and the counterculture that was emerging. David Simpson, a Mattole Valley resident who participated in the counterculture movement of San Francisco, explained, “We made distinctions at the time; Berkeley was political and what was happening in the San Francisco scene was cultural. If you had a kid with long hair and tie-dye clothes, it was really an alternative image to the kids who were being shipped off to be slaughtered in Vietnam” (personal interview, 2016). Indeed, the development of countercultural communities in reaction to the war effort incited new ways of political and social engagement. As American activist and politician Tom Hayden (2009: 43) described it, “The distancing became somatic, a revulsion felt in our bodies. Young men’s hair grew longer overnight. Bras fell off. The clothing one wore became a badge of separation.”

In San Francisco and across America, the anti-racist, anti-war, free speech, and various other social movements hybridized with countercultural practices. In the Bay Area, the convergence of political activism and cultural experimentation facilitated new relationships. Groups such as Abbie Hoffman’s Youth International Party, whose members were known as “the Yippies,” pulled inspiration from the political philosophies



of the Bay Area Diggers (Corva, 2013: 3; Lee, 2012).<sup>4</sup> Campus organizations, including the Yippies and the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), collaborated with *High Times* magazine, the Black Panthers, and the Weather Underground, creating the political arm of the counterculture movement. Correspondingly, the counterculture influenced an evolution of campus activism. Free Speech Movement activist and sociologist Jentri Anders (as cited in Kitchell, 1990) explained,

We were all beginning to see that it was much, much bigger than the war. It was much, much bigger than the civil rights movement. There were major things wrong and I think the people who got involved in the counterculture on some level perceived that they did not want to be a part of what was wrong with a culture that was destroying the world. Now I can see that much better in retrospect than I could right then, but, the point is, that it was the culture that was sick. It was the whole American way of looking at things that was sick. So I think we came to a realization that one way to change that is to just live it differently. Instead of trying to change the structure in a direct, confrontational way, you just drop out and live it the way you think it ought to be.

The notion that young people could live life differently contributed to a plethora of communal living arrangements; unlike any other time in American history, communalism blossomed. Researcher Timothy Miller, who wrote extensively of communes, highlights the Diggers for their contribution to this process.<sup>5</sup> Consciously choosing their name after a group of English land defenders who rejected the annexing of private property and occupied the Surrey commons in 1649, the Diggers, both in seventeenth-century England and the Bay Area during the 1960s, promoted

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<sup>4</sup> Based in San Francisco, the Diggers were a theatrical mime group, service organization, band of outlaws, and urban commune, who were collectively a central component of the hip culture in the Bay Area (Miller, 1999: 44).

<sup>5</sup> The activities of the Diggers served a wide variety of political and social functions. Their chronology can be studied at length on their website. See: [http://diggers.org/digger\\_Chronology.pdf](http://diggers.org/digger_Chronology.pdf)

communalism (McDonagh & Griffin, 2016). While the former occupied the English commons, the latter established crash pads and promoted communal living in the neighborhoods of San Francisco. Bridging the collective roots of America's own history with renewed consanguinity, the practices of the Diggers linked the historic foundation of United States society with the developing counterculture (Miller, 1999: 3).<sup>6</sup>

Young people turned on, tuned in, and dropped out in the late 1960s, migrating in droves to the notorious Haight-Ashbury neighborhood of San Francisco. Communalism, counterculture, and social experimentation fused, inspiring radical social structures. As Simpson recalled,

Haight-Ashbury especially was like a discovery for people who were living there. All of a sudden there was a strong sense of community and place – deep cultural resonances. And we, as the Diggers, stepped up with makeshift social services: free food in the park, a free clinic, a free store, a lot of free concerts, and free celebrations. The philosophy was that there was so much excess, which there still is, and the idea was that we should live off the excess (personal interview, 2016).

Aiding in the “discovery,” the use of mind-altering substances became a prevalent feature of the Haight. LSD, mescaline, psilocybin, and cannabis were seen as helpful tools for breaking down social conditioning, challenging existing orders, and envisioning new ways of being (Miller, 1999: 6). Timothy Leary, a Harvard professor turned countercultural icon, publicly supported psychedelics and was involved in psilocybin studies with students. Leary's encouragement of psychedelic experimentation fused with the anti-war movement and sexual revolution, creating a schism in the American cultural

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<sup>6</sup> It didn't hurt that “Digger” was also a derogatory reference to California Indigenous peoples. Reclaiming the term, suggesting a closeness to the earth and unconcern for European standards of propriety, was another way of thumbing their noses at the dominant culture.

landscape. Facilitated in part by the use of these substances, a philosophical departure from dominant culture was spreading. For the conventional parents, that philosophical departure was creeping rapidly and insidiously through the youth culture and signaling the end of Western civilization; for the hippies, the departure was setting the world on fire – out with the old and decrepit, in with the vitalized, new, and enlightened.

While contributing to the philosophical estrangement of the counterculture, cannabis and LSD would also create a symbolic severance. Serving both the state and the subculture, claims of a drug-related “social disorder” would drive the two forces further apart (Corva, 2013: 3). In the Declaration of a State of War, the first broadcast of the Weather Underground, Bernardine Dohrn announced, “We fight in many ways. Dope is one of our weapons. The laws against marijuana mean that millions of us are outlaws long before we actually split” (Dohrn, 1970).<sup>7</sup> The demonization of cannabis, while previously the focus of racialized geopolitics between the United States and Mexico, opened the door for new policing strategies against counterculture communities (Corva, 2013: 3). From the Bay Area to state and national levels, cannabis would be capitalized on throughout the following decades by Ronald Reagan, Richard Nixon, and J. Edgar Hoover (to name only a few), working to further political careers while waging war on the American citizenry (Hayden, 2009; Miller, 1999). Nixon’s policy advisor John Ehrlichman (as cited in Baum, 2016) has since confirmed,

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<sup>7</sup> The Weather Underground Organization (WUO), which developed from the original organization “Weathermen,” was an underground anti-imperialist organization. The group went on the offensive with the U.S. government by carrying out armed actions and bombing the U.S. Capitol Building on February 28, 1971 (Gilbert, 2012: 170).

The Nixon campaign in 1968, and the Nixon White House after that, had two enemies: the antiwar left and black people. You understand what I'm saying? We knew we couldn't make it illegal to be either against the war or black, but by getting the public to associate the hippies with marijuana and blacks with heroin, and then criminalizing both heavily, we could disrupt those communities. We could arrest their leaders, raid their homes, break up their meetings, and vilify them night after night on the evening news. Did we know we were lying about the drugs? Of course we did.

The "New Left" broadly describes movements of the time which rejected capitalism, bureaucratic communism, and imperialism, and promoted both violent and nonviolent activism (Lynd, 1969: 64). This space of contestation between dominant society and the empowered subcultures set the foundation for state repression of activism, a theme that will be revisited in the following chapters. Keeping focus on the counterculture, things began to turn in the Haight following the Summer of Love in 1967. Simpson explained the decline of the counterculture community, timed with Nixon's rise to office, "It got to be too much. A lot of people exploited it for money or repute, to be famous or be something" (personal interview, 2016). Neighborhoods transitioned from LSD and poppy pills to needles and meth, resulting in a diaspora from the city and a new chapter for the movement (Mirthan-Nelson, personal interview, 2016).

Many participants were already exploring communal living outside of San Francisco, traveling across the nation to communes and cohabitation developments, or establishing themselves in rural communities. The "Digger Farm," Morningstar, located north of the Bay Area outside of Sebastopol, would become one of the most widely referenced communes of this time and aided many young urban refugees in the transition

from the city (Miller, 1996: 46).<sup>8</sup> The emergence of these communal living developments in the country, which promoted the transformative qualities of rural lifestyles, became motivation for others. Scholars Charles Reich and Theodore Roszak elucidated: “The ideologies of the countercultural 1960s-era communes were essentially the ideologies of the dissenting culture salted with traditional American rural idealism” (as cited in Miller, 1999: 150). In this way, the counterculture, the backlash of law and order, and the reinvigorated focus on rural migration set the stage for an unprecedented movement back to the land.

The aforementioned exodus of city-dwellers resulted in a cascade of literature, which would frame this movement. Starting in 1970, John and Jane Shuttleworth began publishing *Mother Earth News*, an important resource for those resettling in rural communities. Editor and publisher John Shuttleworth contended that the magazine was dedicated to “giving people back their lives and stopping the rape of the planet” (as cited in Jacob, 1997: 4). While the idea was not necessarily that they would escape capitalism, new settlers were determined to control their relationship to the modern economic system (Weaver, 2013: ii). The *Whole Earth Catalog* supported new settlers with strategies for building with found materials, adopting older ways and technologies in their homes, and working off-property as little as possible. The social experimentation of this time was

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<sup>8</sup> For new settlers, “Morningstar became a sought-after retreat for the strung out and the exhausted. The resident communards, with their spiritual sensibility and vision of the farm as a kind of ashram, made it their mission to minister to new arrivals” (Daloz, 2016: 95).

colorful and imaginative;<sup>9</sup> in Northern California, many new settlers found themselves exploring the prospect of communes and intentional communities. Searching for a place to start anew, a handful of them found the Mattole.

### The Mattole Valley Was No Different from the Rest of the American West

Northern California is a place of legend. The Mattole Valley can be found in the territory of the “Lost Coast,” a rugged piece of coastline where the King Range mountains rise out of black sand beaches and prevent California State Route 1 from proceeding further north. The area is subject to ongoing transformation as it straddles active fault lines and features one of the fastest growing mountain ranges in the world (Brain, 2012: 55). The Mattole River, the mighty life-source for the Valley, carves out this section of rugged terrain. The watershed connects Petrolia, Honeydew, and Whitethorn, three unincorporated settlements, collectively known as the “Mattole” or the “Mattole Valley.” The curtain of steep mountains, dangerous roads, dense forests, and the buffer of the ocean to the west keeps the community relatively isolated and remote.

Northern California is considered backcountry by most, as the rugged and disjointed coastal hills have kept population numbers low. Though major timber harvest camps and associated cities were established throughout much of the Pacific Northwest, the geography of Northern California has historically discouraged large concentrations of

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<sup>9</sup> For more on the demographics of new settlers, see: Jeffrey, J. (1997). *New Pioneers: The Back-to-the-Land Movement and the Search for a Sustainable Future*. University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press.

people (Raphael, 1985: 7). The geography of the area is distinct, yet the broader narrative of the American West frames the region. Over the last hundred and fifty years, while there may be variation in the details, the patterns remain the same (House, 1999). There have been three distinct waves of change:

Occupation of the land by various people acting out the European American doctrine of Manifest Destiny so rapidly and violently as to effect a nearly total break in the cultural continuity of the human presence; quickly exhausted economies based on centralized extractive industries in the century that followed; and more recently, a wave of new immigrants fleeing the failures of urban centers to provide them with security and community (House, 1999: 175).

Manifest Destiny arrived in the Valley in 1849 when two gold prospectors, James Young and Alfred Hadley (A.A. Hadley), found themselves in this remote region of Northern California. While their prospecting proved unsuccessful, the beauty and abundance of the area made an impression. Since time immemorial, the Valley had been home to the Mattole and the Sinkyone people, who had long fished and hunted in the lower valley (House, 1989). The Indigenous peoples extensively tended the landscape, managing the forests with fire and maintaining open grasslands (House, 1989; Zuckerman, 1995). This would change when Hadley and others returned to the Valley to establish settlements by 1857 (Cooskey, 2010; Roscoe, J., 1977; Zuckerman, 1989). The first settlers were farmers and ranchers who converted native grassland into house sites, home gardens, orchards, and rangeland (House, 1989). With the massacre and sanctioned

removal of Indigenous peoples, “the arrival of Euro-American explorers foreshadowed a change in human relationships to the lower river valley” (Zuckerman, 1995).<sup>10</sup>

Following the establishment of homesteads in the Mattole Valley, a series of economic boom and bust cycles shaped the social and ecological landscape.<sup>11</sup> Despite trends in resource extraction, the terrain insulated the region from major industry and settlement; rail lines were not feasible and the transport of products was slow and inefficient. While the landscape was blanketed by large trees, there did not yet exist a feasible way to extract whole logs from the hills. Industries such as split-stuff (fencing, shingles, and stakes), tanbark, ranching, hunting, and trapping were decentralized activities, which could be applied in remote locations (Raphael, 1985: 9). Thus cultural identity was shaped by land-based industries, mandated by the remoteness of the region and the societal structures that formed away from centers of authority or civil society (Raphael, 1985).

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<sup>10</sup> William E. Roscoe’s (1940) work, *The History of the Mattole Valley*, is widely referenced concerning the interactions between the Indigenous peoples of the Mattole and white settlers. While Roscoe contended that not all of the settlers were violent towards Indigenous populations, the history of the Mattole aligns with the settler colonial legacy that came to Northern California during the gold rush. Chisa Oros (2016), *The Role of Fort Humboldt During the California Gold Rush: A Focus on Local Indigenous Women’s Struggle, Resistance and Resilience*, powerfully broadens and deepens the understanding of the legacy of extractive industries and the culture of violence against Indigenous communities and the earth. Oros also described the resilience of Indigenous peoples, a piece of history that is excluded in dominant literature, and challenges Mattole erasure.

<sup>11</sup> Natural gas vents and oil seeping from the ground began a local land rush that almost doubled the Valley population of 282 to over 450 people by 1870 (Cooskey, 2010; Roscoe, W. E., 1940). Reflecting this pursuit of enterprise, the town of Petrolia earned its name during the oil boom of the 1860s. Many land patents were obtained, numerous test wells drilled, and Union Mattole Co. shipped out oil successfully. However, the boom was short-lived. Tannin from tanbark became a major industry in the early 1900s (CalWater, 2003; Roscoe, J., 1977). Tanbark harvesting continued until the supply was depleted in the early 1920s, around the same time synthetic tanning processes made the entire operation obsolete (CalWater, 2003; Cooskey, 2010; Roscoe, J., 1977). Alongside tannin, agriculture became a major focus and included various fruit trees, berries, and nuts (Cooskey, 2013).



Following World War II, the post-war demand for building materials and increased mechanization turned the focus toward Douglas-fir timber. Aerial photos from the early 1940s and through the mid-1950s show the sudden emergence of extensive logging roads, while photos from the 1960s show an even greater increase in road density (Cooskey, 2010; House, 1989; Zuckerman, 1995). Bulldozers allowed roads to be cut into the steep hillsides, providing access to forests previously reached only by small logging teams with mules (Cooskey, 2010; Raphael, 1985). However, these skid trails and roadways destabilized the landscape. Using bulldozers to cross creeks and streambeds compounded the damage to micro-drainage networks. “Gyppo” or independent logging teams entered the watershed, making agreements with local ranchers to log the land, but without requirements for replanting (House, 2001). Clear-cutting techniques, extensions of boom and bust philosophy, ravaged the valley. In less than three decades, ninety percent of the Mattole region’s ancient Douglas-fir forests had vanished (House, 2001).

When new settlers made their way to the Valley, their arrival coincided with the tail end of major timber extraction. The deflated timber market threatened the livelihoods of the traditional ranching community, which had supplemented finances through logging (Brain, 2012: 58). New settlers David Simpson and Jane Lapiner recounted, “There had been something like seventeen mills operating in the Mattole Valley; the last one was closing down as we got there, and with it, the most consistent source of employment in the valley” (as cited in Bosk, 2001). In their wake, the mills left unemployed residents and a suffering ecological system. Major floods affected the Valley in 1955 and 1964; in some cases, entire hillsides collapsed into the river (Brain, 2012: 55). In a region

notorious for its rainfall, water collected on roads and turned into run-off instead of absorbing into the soil (Zuckerman, 1995). The aforementioned destruction caused by on-the-ground extraction and the combination of naturally erosive soils, slippery geology, and the watershed's precarious location left the Valley vulnerable to further catastrophe (Brain, 2012: 55).

### New Settlers Find Opportunity in the Wake of Extractive Industries

The degraded landscape provided opportunity to the new settlers looking for a place to make their homes. Bob McKee, a resident in the watershed whose family had owned large amounts of ranchland since the 1800s, became a staple in the back-to-the-land dreams (Scott-Goforth, 2013). In the mid-1960s, McKee earned a reputation for subdividing large parcels of land, deemed worthless by banks and developers, with handshake deals (Anderson, 1990; Scott-Goforth, 2013). While McKee sold property to affluent professors migrating north from Berkeley or west from Harvard, he also sold land to welfare recipients for as low as \$25 down and \$25 per month (Scott-Goforth, 2013). In the early 1970s, many of the new settlers did not have high expectations or rigid requirements; they just wanted land. Humboldt County resident Gary Graham Hughes reflected, "In many ways, Bob McKee was seen as the Gandalf of the back-to-the-land movement, in terms of people getting a piece of land" (as cited in Scott-Goforth, 2013). This created an ideal situation for the new settlers, who could put down roots and implement their philosophies without significant financial constraints.

Yet the integration of contrasting communities was not without antagonism. Feelings of “invasion” were experienced in areas across the country as new settlers sought reinhabitation of rural landscapes. For those who arrived in the Mattole Valley, resident and new settler Ruth Rathbun commented, “I suppose the traditional community had very mixed feelings about it” (as cited in Freedlund, 2005: 6). With the mass of people traveling up and down the Pacific coast at that time, there existed two groups: those who were looking to establish themselves in communities and those who were passing through. While the longhaired hippies were easily recognizable in juxtaposition with the rancher population, the new settlers had different practices from the transients, who were known as the “Truckers.” Collecting personal narratives from Southern Humboldt during this contentious time, author Mary Siler Anderson (1990: 35) presented the story:

The Truck Stop was a pivotal event for me, as it was for everyone. When the Truckers first came here, they had seemed like us, by which I mean they were hippies, too, looking for a better life. There was a great tendency to judge people by appearances; hippies had long hair and wore certain kinds of clothing. But when the Truckers decided to practice communality by stealing from Larry Bliss’s Briceland Store, we were all forced to re-evaluate our beliefs. Yes, we believed that corporate America was ripping off the poor, but Larry wasn’t corporate America. His store was our community center and the only place we could buy brown rice and whole wheat flour and the kinds of things we liked to eat. We didn’t know how to deal with them. They were saying things we thought we believed in, like power to the people, but what they were doing was not what we meant by that. It was the rednecks that finally chased them out. We couldn’t deal with it. I think that was the point where people began to feel that it wasn’t enough just to be here. We had to think about what we were doing and begin to build the kind of community in which we wanted to live.

The confrontation at the Briceland Store occurred at the end of the 1960s and functioned as the catalyst for growing tension between ranchers and “the invasion.”

However, the story was not an anomaly. Even after the Truck Stop incident, resentment was expressed toward the new settlers. Another resident shared a story of arriving in the

Mattole:

One of my first trips out here, I was on my way home and there was a cafe near Honeydew that doesn't exist anymore. An old ranch lady named Anne Smith was cooking and serving dinner and I was the only customer. I came in after dark and I had seen a sign in the window that said "Homemade Pie." And, that sounded really good to me. She served me pie and she was talking to me and she said she didn't like what was happening down on the Mathews ranch. New people coming in who don't understand the old values. (This was in the early 1970s and still several years before marijuana.) And I said, "You know, in Southern Humboldt a lot of those people are our friends and a lot of them have really worked hard and built homesteads artfully and positively and are trying to redeem some of this damaged land." To that, she said, "Well, if it is so good there, why don't you all just stay there?" I don't know what I said...I didn't have an answer for that one (Simpson, personal interview, 2016).

These areas of contention foreshadowed the negotiation of relationships that would define the Mattole Valley. Through engaging and reconciling these opposing views, the counterculture would be asked to confront the ideologies they had left in the city.

## INTERLUDE: A STORY ABOUT SALMON

In '74, California went into a three-year drought, which led to water rationing in San Francisco. Here, it played out differently. The mouth of the Mattole closes every summer and then it blows open with the first storms that happen in the fall. The first year we were here was '74 and it rained and the mouth blew open and we discovered that the local people still acted out a vision of subsistence. Salmon are important to the people here, not in the abstract and not for sport fishing, though they are for those as well. There was an unbroken train of subsistence fishing before the white man came that had the same parameters and was acted out on the same basic terms.

At first people chose their favorite riffles and speared fish, usually that was the preferred method – to spear them. That year in '74, the mouth blew open and then it stopped raining. More salmon came into the river than we have ever seen since then, but they were trapped in the pools in the lower river. Whatever justification these people maintained for their subsistence farming, which was illegal (there was a cat and mouse game that went on with the game warden and the fish hunters that was kind of funny), the intensity of poaching that took place against these fish that were trapped in the pools blew any kind of respect one might have for the rationales of subsistence fishing.

In the best of all possible worlds there is nothing wrong; spearing fish at the riffles is sometimes more reasonable than catching them out at sea in a boat. But, it was unregulated and uncontrolled, and in the first three years of the drought the same pattern continued; the fish would get trapped in the pools and people murdered them mercilessly. One guy I know, an old tree faller, bragged about killing eighty-eight salmon – bigger than twenty pounds. Just one guy. So, that was the year it became clear that the salmon were waning in earnest. All the old timers talked about how few fish there had been compared to previous years. It became clear to us that there was a strong relation to the floods of '65 and '64, we knew it was related to the watershed and the stability of the slopes and geomorphic features and the climate which they endured – which is intense rainfall. If you give it half a chance, it will destabilize half a hillside. There I was, writing this paper about the failure of civilizations and somehow all these factors came together into a recognition that there was a job to do and that no one was doing it (Simpson, personal interview, 2016).

## BACKGROUND PART 2: LIFE IN THE WATERSHED

“I had no idea yet of what having a watershed – being part of one, defining one's home as its boundaries and its tangibilities – meant. What defined high for me was its heights. What defined power was its vast storms and lethal earthquakes. What defined mystery was its farthest, least known reaches. What defined beauty was its seemingly endless panoramas. What defined loss was what had been taken from the land and the streams during the post-War logging boom...” (Simpson, 1999).

### Bioregional Philosophy is Entwined in the Mattole Valley

As the new settlers established themselves on the freshly subdivided property, their focus shifted to the needs of their new home. Beyond assisting other residents with building projects, creating new traditions, and socializing with the young families arriving in the Valley, the new settlers began implementing a philosophy that was developing in conjunction with the counterculture. That philosophy was bioregionalism. This section will describe the theoretical and practical components of bioregionalism and then demonstrate how the philosophy was applied to the watershed community of the Mattole through salmon habitat restoration and forest defense.

Bioregionalism is a philosophy of place; it emphasizes the concept that each place on the planet is distinct, natural systems are distinct, and human culture would be best served by orienting itself to the realities of the natural world (Simpson, personal interview, 2016). While the name “bioregionalism” is bulky and a little nebulous, the application of a bioregional philosophy is quite simple. Bioregionalism prioritizes a relationship with ecosystems; this relationship emphasizes responsibility for, and

connection to, one's immediate location (Berg, 2002; Carr, 2005: 76).<sup>12</sup> Not only does this philosophy define humankind in an intimate role with the biosphere, but also it heightens personal awareness of place, emphasizing the unique knowledge local people hold regarding their location. This incorporation of place-based knowledge is integrated in the maintenance of natural systems, emphasizing direct engagement and observation of environmental conditions. Following this rationale of developing a socio-ecological relationship, bioregionalism encourages job creation in the field of ecological restoration. Developing a local economy around the care for and preservation of the environment, focusing on self-sufficiency rather than profit, works to keep people locally based and economically tied to the health of the natural world.

Beyond promoting an investment in one's own bioregion, the philosophy focuses on creating a relationship with a natural system and considering the long-term implications of such a relationship. Extending focus from a more individualized, short-term occupation of a place to a permanent establishment, bioregionalism instructs humans to harmonize with nonhuman entities. With geographical relocation, humans can opt out of ecological destruction by relocating away from an exploited environment. Conversely, by "living-in-place," a responsibility for the health of the environment is not only philosophical but also necessary for human survival. Bioregional scholars promote the creation of a permanent connection with a location and advocate for the repair of problematic relationships. Through restoration and maintenance work, and practicing

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<sup>12</sup> A bioregion is typically defined by the climatology, plant and animal geography, natural history, and other physical descriptions from the natural sciences (Berg & Dasmann, 1978: 218).

sustainable ways of satisfying the basic human needs of food, water, housing, energy, and materials, humans can begin to live in place, aware of and invested in the outcomes of their actions (Berg, 2002).

While it might seem as though bioregionalism is intended to benefit the nonhuman world, the philosophy also provides important social benefits. Bioregionalism encompasses and further develops the concept of social capital, described by scholar Robert Putnam as relationships of trust fostered through organized social networks that promote norms of cooperation, reciprocity, and mutual aid (Putnam, 1993). From a political science background, Putnam and Feldstein (2003: 2) explain how social capital develops through “bonding and bridging” relationships. Bonding social capital happens through the connectedness people feel in close personal relationships; through these relationships, the foundation of cooperation, aid, and reciprocity is established. Based on their analysis, bridging social capital is more difficult to create because it means going outside of your existing group to forge relationships across ideological lines (Putnam & Feldstein, 2003: 3). Both of these forms of social capital are seen through restoration work and forest defense, where residents must bond with their community members to address collective needs, and bridge ideological gaps when confronting problems.

Building upon the foundation of social capital, bioregional activist and scholar Mike Carr suggested a third element, “ecosocial capital,” as a way of understanding the implicit ecological nature of social capital. Ecosocial capital addresses the deeply spiritual connection felt by people in regard to the natural world, generating trust, cooperation, and kinship with nonhuman life just as they might with members of their



human community (Carr, 2005: 17; Shaw & Francis, 2008). Through the development of community-building projects, in the field of restoration or place-based work, social and ecosocial capital are created and, in turn, further support bioregional initiatives (Carr, 2005: 17).

Ecosocial capital was a primary component of the new settler arrival in the Mattole; many were seeking a type of reinhabitation, a connection with the land that had been lost. This differed from the settlers from previous eras, as reinhabitation work and the engagement with ecosocial dynamics counters the dominant capitalist narratives that promote a domination and commodification of the earth. Further explaining reinhabitation, foundational bioregional scholars Peter Berg and Raymond Dasmann (1978: 217) wrote,

Reinhabitation means learning to live-in-place in an area that has been disrupted and injured by past exploitation. It involves becoming aware of the particular ecological relationships that operate within and around it. It means understanding activities and evolving social behavior that will enrich the life of that place, restore its life-supporting systems, and establish an ecologically and socially sustainable pattern of existence within it. Simply stated it involves becoming fully alive in and with a place. It involves applying for membership in a biotic community and ceasing to be its exploiter.

Applying a reinhabitation framework challenges previous political boundaries, such as national, state, and county lines. Instead, communities become organized around watersheds or within natural perimeters. While bioregionalism emphasizes local independence, its proponents also describe the ability to fuse healthy and sustainable local economies with regional and interregional partnerships (Berg, 2002; Carr, 2005: 71). An illustration of Carr's (2005) analysis can be seen in much of Humboldt County,

where the focus on local and regional trade promotes a reliance on place, encourages patterns of consumption that align with the needs of the local community, emphasizes human dynamics as an integral part of environmental systems, and then provides options for inter-bioregional trade. In sharing knowledge and goods, support for one's own biosphere allows support for others. Conceptually, bioregionalism accentuates the harmony of natural systems within each bioregion as necessary for preserving the integrity of the greater biosphere (Berg, 2002). Researchers anticipate that implementing bioregional priorities will precipitate a transformation in society as it shifts its focus towards regional cultures, and in turn, a more cooperative world culture (Clark, 1997).

In contrast, a global capitalist economy focuses on a limited amount of commodities or even a singular commodity, in a particular region. Thus bioregional advocates tend to be critical of international trade agreements, industrialization, corporate media, and nation-state power dynamics, which promote a more compartmentalized approach to natural systems. It is through bioregional engagement that they attempt to challenge not only the structures and implications of globalization, but also the underlying value system resulting in exploitation. To unpack the meaning of the global capitalist system, Carr (2005: 6) offers:

Contemporary globalization comprises a daunting set of interconnected processes that includes the information and telecommunications revolution, flexible "just-in-time" production systems, more extensive globalized trade networks, the capitalist revolution in agricultural production in both advanced industrial and many "Third World" nations (the "green revolution", and, most importantly perhaps, the increased power and global organizational and market reach of transnational corporations (built up during the post-World War II Keynesian period).

While the culmination of these features is, as Carr described, daunting, the major defining factors can be summarized as global and corporate. After World War II, the shift in the United States' economic model was predicated on a growth-for-growth's-sake arrangement, propped up by the economic features and policies described by Carr. The ultimate ends, efficiency and profit, contribute to the utilization of foreign production capabilities and resource access, and the formation of corporations to extract these benefits. The philosophy underlying global capitalism mirrors the aforementioned story of the American West; similar dynamics are seen in the boom and bust cycles of the Mattole Valley. When one commodity, such as tannin, was no longer in demand and the tan oaks were depleted, the Valley's industry drastically shifted to extensive mechanized timber harvesting to capture the new market. Consequently, the increasingly globalized system, propped up by the consolidation of power by corporations, creates a juggernaut, as Carr (2005) described; a global system of corporate expansion in a post-World War II arena. In recognizing these dynamics, bioregional proponents attempt to control their relationship with capitalism by reconnecting with local biospheres as a conscientious objection to an increasingly global system.

The presence of bioregional philosophy in the Mattole Valley is not a coincidence; Peter Berg, who popularized the philosophy, was central to the countercultural movement of San Francisco, of which many Mattole residents were a part. Former Digger David Simpson reflected, "If the Haight had a political philosopher, it was Berg" (personal interview, 2016). In conjunction with Berg, Ray Dasmann, a prominent former professor at the University of California Santa Cruz, published the

preliminary literature on the concept of bioregionalism. Instrumental to the establishment of Planet Drum, Peter Berg's bioregionally focused organization, Mattole Valley residents served as writers and contributors to the movement (Doran, 2000; Fukunaga, 2013). While tenets of bioregionalism may be identifiable in other contexts around the country, bioregionalism emerged as an important political and social movement specifically in California and British Columbia (Lynch et al., 2012: 3).<sup>13</sup> Acknowledging a bioregional perspective, communities began advocating for a transformation of political, economic, and social relationships.

This transformation was well suited to the new settlers, who saw the results of extensive logging on the salmon habitat. The Department of Fish and Wildlife (DFW) was severely underfunded, understaffed, and did not share the sense of urgency of the local residents. As they settled in the Valley, the new settlers were deciding what their proper role would be, besides being homesteaders, and searching for work that aligned with their underlying values. The residents described how these elements came together in a recognition that it was appropriate for local people to take action, implement a bioregional perspective, and repair the salmon habitat.

The residents held meetings mostly in the kitchen of Rex and Ruth Rathbun, new settlers who had a home centrally located on the Mathews' ranch. Based on inspiration from other salmon restoration efforts, self-education, and experimentation, the new

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<sup>13</sup> Despite the pervasiveness of capitalism, bioregionalism as a movement has grown. Carr indicated that while corporate-controlled media has kept the expansion of this movement quiet, unnoticed, and largely ignored, examples of bioregionalism could be identified in the United States, Mexico, and Canada, and more recently, Central and South America, Europe, Japan, and Australia (Carr, 2005).

settlers decided to implement a hatchbox project to aid in salmon rearing. Hatchboxes are streamside incubators used for capturing adult salmon and retrieving their eggs for protection until maturity. Relying on backyard passion to supply the volunteer force for their efforts, the Mattole new settlers used scavenged and donated materials to construct and implement hatchboxes on the Mattole River (Brain, 2012: 54). These hatchboxes would be used to mitigate the degraded spawning and rearing conditions in the watershed and maintain the wild salmon runs.<sup>14</sup>

While fostering all forms of social capital, the hatchbox effort did not proceed without roadblocks. The size of the watershed made work between neighbors an imperative for success; however, ideological differences remained. Resident Freeman House explained, “We were dealing in the realm of cultural social change because of our background in bioregionalism” (House, 1999). Yet the self-righteousness of the new settlers, brandishing college degrees and cultural superiority, further offended the ranching community. The rush of environmentalism that occurred through the 1970s had put the ranchers in a defensive relationship with the government. In the face of a multitude of unfamiliar federal policies, which worked to separate human involvement from the wilderness and implicated local communities in environmental degradation, ranchers spoke of the “good ol’ days” when the Department of Fish and Game (later evolved into the Department of Fish and Wildlife) had encouraged local residents to

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<sup>14</sup> Freeman House (1999), a highly revered bioregionalism author and Mattole community member, developed his home in the Valley at the end of the 1970s. House eloquently described the new settlers’ reinhabitation and restoration work in the deeply insightful book, *Totem Salmon*.

manage nonhuman salmon predators by shooting them (House, 1999: 123). Having new state and federal regulations impinging upon life in the Mattole, the ranchers felt violated, betrayed, and cut out of the decision making process (House, 1999: 122).

Seeking approval for citizen-led salmon rearing, the residents aimed to shift governmental policies toward a bioregional approach. They countered the untouched wilderness ideal that worked to sever human relationships from natural systems, rather than give them management abilities (Fukunaga, 2013). Navigating the channels of bureaucracy, the restoration workers triumphed over obstacles and unprecedented terrain in receiving government approval for their project. The residents established the Mattole Watershed Salmon Support Group, which would later evolve into Mattole Salmon Group (MSG), and proceeded with their community-based restoration work. Their efforts established the Mattole as home to one of the first citizen-led ecological restoration efforts in the West (Brain, 2012: 129). In researching the Mattole community, sociologist Mayumi Fukunaga demonstrated how local successes with salmon restoration legitimized citizen involvement with local systems; this process drastically countered dominant environmental and political discourse which mandated the removal of human dynamics from natural systems in times of recovery, not only on a national level, but globally (Fukunaga, 2013: 162).

Freeman House recalled, “We would be attempting to demystify hatchery science and then to turn it on its head—to use it as a way of putting ourselves in the position of learning from the salmon rather than as a way to reorganize nature” (House, 1999: 133). This philosophical divergence was highlighted in a lecture titled *Making Amends with the*

*Myriad Creatures*; bioregional scholar Stephanie Mills (1991) pointed to the ecological restoration of the Mattole River watershed in Northern California as an inspiring representation of reinhabitory work. From young students to older residents, the hands-on work with salmon was a unique opportunity; for people moving to the Valley with thoughts of reinhabitation, bioregional philosophy emerged as a cornerstone of the Mattole community.

### Salmon Do Not Live Just in Streams; They Live in Watersheds

The development of a bioregional focus in the Mattole was part of a reinvigorated environmental focus spreading across the nation during the 1970s. The first Earth Day on April 22, 1970, marked the beginning of an era during which important environmental initiatives and policies were drafted, environmental group membership increased, and organizations and agencies such as Greenpeace, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and Friends of the Earth emerged (Bevington, 2009: 20; House, 1999). Working within the context of the Mattole watershed, restoration efforts gained traction and expanded. Yet the implications of industrialism and a globalized capitalist economy threatened this work. This section introduces the broadening restoration effort in the Mattole and illustrates the major forces of policy and economic contention that countered the bioregional approach of the new settlers.

Previous bioregional endeavors such as the Mattole Salmon Group created the foundation for the Mattole Restoration Council (MRC), which worked to emphasize

solutions that would encompass a more expansive geographic area and include more hands-on work focused on forests, roads, and water use, to name a few areas of concern. Founded in 1983, the MRC wrote on their website regarding the insufficient efforts to restore salmon populations, “After these efforts failed to produce the desired results, it quickly became apparent that salmon do not live just in streams, they live in watersheds. In order to save the native salmon runs, residents would need to care for the whole system.”<sup>15</sup> While important policies on state and national levels, such as the Z’Berg-Nejedly Forest Practices Act of 1973, worked to curtail erosion caused by abandoned logging roads, the arteries of the river continued to clog from sediment levels, road erosion, timber harvesting, and other elements that thwarted the salmon restoration initiatives first attempted by the MSG. The MRC expanded the focus of restoration work to address rivers and streams directly, but in doing so, were attempting to change the hardened norms of the community, centered around logging.

While cultural changes were necessary within the Mattole Valley, the community was not insulated from state and national policies. The 1970s saw tremendous strides in environmental protection, but the work of the MSG and MRC, to bond and bridge the countering dynamics of the community, was challenged by the political shifts of the 1980s. Under assault by President Ronald Reagan, environmental protections were steamrolled in an increasingly corporatized nation (Bevington, 2009: 26; Braggs, 2012). Ultimately, the policies left in place on state and federal levels could not stop clear-cuts

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<sup>15</sup> Mattole Restoration Council. (N.d.). *Mission and History*. Retrieved April 4, 2017, from <http://www.mattole.org/about/mission-history/>



on sensitive habitat land in the Mattole. In alignment with the economic transitions under Reagan, a change in a local timber company's ownership eroded the last remaining protections for Mattole forests.

Pacific Lumber Company (PALCO or PL), a locally based logging company, had established conservative economic and forest policies through the area. While the company issued publicly traded stock as early as the 1920s, the persistent involvement of the Murphy family on the company's board had fostered a public perception of being locally owned and operated (Braggs, 2012: 73-74). However, this perception was challenged in 1985 when Charles Hurwitz, CEO of the Texas-based Maxxam Corporation, purchased a controlling share of stock in PL. Local residents, including the Murphy family, struggled to grasp how a takeover could occur without the family's consent (Braggs, 2012: 74). This manner of hostile takeover was mirrored across the nation as economic structural adjustments in the 1980s consolidated power for a new elite class of financiers, emerging to control American markets (Braggs, 2012: 74).<sup>16</sup>

The takeover, made possible through coercive stock purchases and junk bonds, placed the largest and most viable old-growth Douglas-fir forest under the control of Maxxam Corporation (House, 1999: 188). Of this land, 3,000 acres were located in the headwaters of the two largest tributaries of the Mattole River, the North Fork and the Upper North Fork (House, 1999: 188). In order to pay off the bonds Maxxam had sold to

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<sup>16</sup> “As the timber industry responded to the neoliberal reforms and market liberalization of the 1980s, small, local, and financially stable logging companies were raided by recently established transnational corporations designed to profit from leveraged buyouts” (Braggs, 2012: 23).

finance the \$863-million-dollar purchase, Maxxam drained pensions and spurred a sharp increase in timber harvesting (Cobb, 2008). This process of taking over companies and then liquidating assets is a legacy that has followed Maxxam to this day. Unfortunately, in “tree” terms, “liquidating assets” equates to clear-cuts.

The corporate takeover resulted in accelerated rates of clear-cutting and milling. Jobs were lost to increased mechanization, while the fast-paced harvesting practices left forests ravaged. For the original PL crews, the new trend in corporate culture was a difficult adjustment. During the first year of Maxxam ownership in 1986, one employee recalled, “We went into an area where probably no man had set foot in a century or more. It was a wonderland in there, and everything was felled. We left a moonscape” (Loucks et. al, 1998: 222). The destruction of spotted owl, marbled murrelet, bald eagle, and wild salmon habitat, the savage desecration of the landscape, and the threat to the longevity of local communities resulted in a call to action that was echoed across the nation. In the late 1980s, the “Timber Wars” raged throughout the Pacific Northwest.

Carrying on into the 1990s, the Timber Wars marked a momentous clash between environmentalists and timber workers over the last old-growth conifer forests (Braggs, 2012: 21). Bound to the future of the forests, the spotted owl became the rallying point and symbol for environmentalists; interwoven in the owl’s defense was a critique of forest management and the broader condition of the forests (Bevington, 2009: 118). In 1990, “Redwood Summer” represented the apex of contention between environmental organizers and logging companies as roughly 3,000 organizers arrived in Northern California to engage in forest defense and direct action practices (Bevington, 2009: 45-

46). Drawing from the civil rights movement's Freedom Summer campaign in Mississippi during 1964, non-violent and civil disobedience actions became the focus of Earth First! and other environmental organizers.<sup>17</sup> Participants gathered in Northwest watershed communities from around the nation, rallying around spotted owl habitat and blocking old-growth harvesting practices.

While contention over the forests brought attention to the polarized perspectives, the divide was not black and white; many community members in the Mattole saw a need for forest protection, but also "sensible" forest practices. Others rallied around "sensitive" solutions, which focused on the more philosophical foundation of earth protection. Eventually, dichotomous positions emerged, separating those who fought logging of any kind versus those who supported aggressive clear-cut practices. These two groups of stakeholders were vehemently opposed, but were not representative of the Mattole community. Despite the ideological clash, what can be seen from the influence of the Mattole community was the pervasiveness of a bioregional ethic. Researcher Sierra Braggs (2012) discovered how the culture of Northern California, and specifically the philosophy of new settlers, was a critical component of forest defense initiatives occurring in conjunction with the environmental movement.

Today, the residents of the Mattole continue to work on forest management and have been involved on a multitude of levels, from suing over timber harvest plans to

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<sup>17</sup> For more information about Redwood Summer, the Timber Wars, and Earth First! see: *The Rebirth of Environmentalism* by Douglas Bevington (2009) or *Earth First!: The Rise of Ecoaction* by Sierra Braggs (2012).

putting their bodies on the front lines. While there is much to be explored in the way of forest defense in this area, and this discussion merely scrapes the surface in regard to the following years of forest protection and preservation in Humboldt County, the experiences of the new settlers were critically shaped by these chapters in history. Many residents work to advance forest initiatives and actions that informed the original bioregional work in the Valley. Their efforts continue to block the practices threatening their way of life, a reality that resonates throughout the Pacific Northwest. As I write, the Mattole faces another timber harvest project on land they have struggled to protect. Reinhabitation work continues as residents persist in their mission to change their relationships with natural systems, to learn from these nonhuman entities, and to cease to be their exploiters.

### Flower Power Transforms the Mattole Valley

“The marijuana saga is rife with paradox and polarity. It is all about doubles, twins, dualities: fiber and flower, medicine and menace, sacrament and recreant, gift and commodity” (Lee, 2012: 7).

“We had been outlaws in spirit when we came up here. The pot made us outlaws in practice” (Anderson, 1990: 76).

The market forces that motivated extraction and the rejuvenated logging efforts of the 1980s and 1990s were not irregularities in the story of the back-to-the-land movement. The capitalist machine and the political landscape degraded environmental systems where new settlers lived, fueled the timber wars of the 1990s, and

simultaneously escalated and mutilated a developing cannabis economy. What is demonstrated in the literature is the way in which communities have been dramatically impacted by the global capitalist system. This becomes clear in the context of watershed restoration, as well as cannabis agriculture. While this makes the story of new settlers in the Mattole a multifaceted discussion, it is more reflective of the reality of dominant and counterculture contention. This chapter follows the growth of cannabis in the Mattole Valley, connecting the countercultural resistance of San Francisco to the proliferation of the industry today and demonstrating the detriment to a bioregional perspective because of market articulation. As residents described the timber industry,

The people in our community who were (and are) part of the logging and ranching culture, and who participated in the logging boom and the removal of a lot of timber from this valley, many of them are our neighbors and our friends, and many of them were moved around by forces that they didn't understand (as cited in Bosk, 2001).

The same can be said for cannabis. In seeing these elements as extensions of the same system, bioregionalism persists as a diametrically opposed alternative.

While some new settlers had financial resources to cushion their homesteading transition, most lived in a state of economic insecurity. Many of them described arriving in the Mattole in a bus or a van, with basic tools or simply dreams in their possession. Some residents commuted to jobs in other towns or built traditional careers alongside the rancher community. Others saw cannabis agriculture as a means of survival. Danny Rathbun, the son of Rex and Ruth, who moved to the Mattole in the 1970s as a young boy, clarified, “Almost no one came to the Mattole at the beginning with the intention to grow marijuana. No one was dreaming of getting rich. It was just a sustaining bit of

income” (research interview, 2016). Just as cannabis was instrumental in the development of the Haight, so too it aided the settlers in their back-to-the-land vision.

For the most part cannabis was grown in kitchen gardens, amongst tomatoes, and was meant to be enjoyed by friends and family (Brady, 2014: 67). At first, a few seeds were planted, the crop grew and was harvested, and the people celebrated the process together. However, even at the beginning growing cannabis was lucrative. Throughout Southern Humboldt in the early 1970s, cannabis could be sold for \$200 a pound and the price only seemed to be rising. For the new settlers who turned to farming cannabis, it just made sense. As previously discussed, the remote region is isolated from major economic considerations. The added income provided by cannabis agriculture made it possible for many of the back-to-the-landers to sustain their homesteading lifestyle in a place with limited options for financial security. Additionally, it supported bioregional initiatives. In tandem with a restoration economy, cannabis agriculture emerged as a tool that enabled bioregional work; restoration projects were financed, and free time for community involvement and ecological volunteerism was made available (Raphael, 1986: 146).

In the 1970s, there was a general sense that everyone was poor in the Mattole Valley – even though the finances of the newcomers, who were living in the hills, were unknown to locals (Cooskey, 2014). Many people believed the new residents had trust funds; others believed they were making money from selling cannabis, but it was not talked about openly. New settler Andrea Cohen described the situation, “The old timers were pretty leery of us, thinking we were lazy no-good hippies that smoked dope all day

long. Well, they figured out that was not true as time went on” (personal interview, 2016). Despite proving themselves with hard work and a commitment to the community, Cohen described the turning point for cannabis agriculture in the Mattole Valley as timed with a tumultuous ocean storm, a shipwreck, and bundles of cannabis washing up on the beach.

As the story goes, a couple of Mattole residents were out on the beach when something unusual happened; what has been described as a big square bundle, wrapped securely in black plastic and secured with metal bands, washed up onto the beach. The package was waterproof and packed so tightly that when it burst open, it spread cannabis across the sand like seaweed. Based on the story collected by local historian Laura Cooskey, twenty-eight bales were discovered that night by a couple of Mattole residents, each bale holding forty pounds of cannabis. Dry and undamaged, the 1120 pounds of “sea weed” created an opportunity beyond anyone’s wildest imaginations (Cooskey, 2014). While cannabis had been associated with longhaired hippies, seeing the profitability enticed people from all lifestyles and occupations to grow the plant.

Northern California was almost fated to become a cannabis-growing mecca. For one, the introduction of cannabis growing in Northern California was timed with the arrival of the back-to-the-land movement of the late 1960s and 1970s (Anderson, 1990; August, 2012: 2; Corva, 2013; McCubbrey, 2007; Raphael, 1985). Not only was there a community of cannabis-friendly residents emigrating to the northern communities of the state, but the introduction of cannabis seeds from the mountains of Afghanistan and Pakistan provided individuals at higher latitudes the opportunity to grow a more

regionally appropriate strain.<sup>18</sup> The industry also aligned with the activities of Northern California's past; Ray Raphael described cannabis as the "perfect embodiment of a people's capitalism" (Raphael, 1978). It fit in with the rugged individualism mantra of the traditional residents and was an extension of outlaw culture, which had developed throughout the unregulated hills of California. While most Mattole residents may not have moved to the area to grow the plant, Humboldt County quickly became synonymous with high-grade cannabis and the region renowned for cannabis agriculture (Leeper, 1990: 99).

However, the Federal Government quickly assaulted the isolated lifestyles of new settlers. The aforementioned demonization of cannabis by President Nixon during the election cycle gained momentum with Nixon's declaration of a "war" on cannabis and other substances in 1971 (Lee, 2012: 133). This crusade against drugs was a useful tool of repression against those who might inspire radical social movements and has continued to be used as such (Miranda, 1998: 69). Despite Nixon's forced resignation in 1974, a backlash against ideological dissenters, under the guise of cannabis eradication, had been set in motion (Lee, 2012: 133). The war on drugs resulted in a dramatic increase in the size and presence of federal drug control agencies, mandatory sentencing measures and no-knock warrants, and the listing of cannabis in the most restrictive category of

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<sup>18</sup> There exist two important (there is a less significant third, *Cannabis ruderalis*) types of cannabis plants: *Cannabis sativa* and *Cannabis indica*. While *Cannabis sativas* are typically suited for tropical or semitropical environments, *Cannabis indicas* prefer cooler climates. The cross-pollinating of these plants in the 1970s allowed cannabis growers to select specific traits, such as higher levels of tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), faster growth cycles and maturation, smell, taste, appearance, and other variations which would greatly diversify the industry (Lee, 2012: 177).



drugs, Schedule One (Lee, 2012: 119). Symbolically, it targeted the currents of the Beats, the counterculture, and the anti-war rebellion of the Sixties.

In the international arena, the Federal Government used the “war on drugs” rhetoric to launch a multi-national attack and, as an eradication technique, promoted aerial spraying of paraquat, a powerful herbicide, over Mexican cannabis farms (Corva, 2013). This contaminated international cannabis imports and redirected market interests towards the new settlers who were growing cannabis in the California hills (Corva, 2013; Raphael, 1985). By the mid-1970s, internal and external processes had transformed homegrown cannabis into a viable export commodity (Corva, 2013: 3). Nicknamed the “Emerald Triangle” – after the drug eradication efforts implemented against the “Golden Triangle” of Southeast Asia – Trinity, Mendocino, and Humboldt Counties would top the list of government eradication efforts (Lee, 2012). An unprecedented global market was emerging in financially depressed communities, directly fueled by government initiatives to curtail social movements by way of cannabis eradication.<sup>19</sup>

### The Campaign Against Counterculture Planting

“Fuck them – they spend our money on war machines and plastic crap. Fuck them if they come after us” (personal interview, 2016).

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<sup>19</sup> Social science researcher Dominic Corva (2013: 3) argued, “Contemporary politics of policing cannabis in the US emerged from the 'culture wars' of the 1960s. Literally and/or figuratively, the first wave of settlers to what is now called the Emerald Triangle were veterans of campus activism across the nation, especially on University of California campuses, where Ronald Reagan made his political career persecuting student movements; and countercultural hippies who were often part of San Francisco’s Haight-Ashbury scene.”

While the new settlers defended the forests from the Reagan administration's economic vision, they would also find themselves under attack as the same administration "resurrected" Nixon's anti-drug policies and turned Northern California into a militarized combat-zone (Lee, 2012: 178). The war in the California hills took notable form in the establishment of the Campaign Against Marijuana Planting (CAMP). Established in 1983, CAMP was a seasonal task force that focused on rural cannabis eradication (Raphael, 1985; Corva, 2013). Although it was a statewide initiative, interviewees in Mary Siler Anderson's book *Whatever Happened to the Hippies?* throw light on the concentrated effort against the Mattole and Eel River communities (1990: 101).

Credited to California Attorney General John van de Kamp, a Democrat with a law and order focus, CAMP worked to "bust" grow operations or "grows" around the time of harvest, which is primarily in the fall for outdoor producers (Anders, 1990; August, 2012; Corva, 2013: 3). Operating on a small budget and for only a couple of months of the year, the organization worked to demonstrate their own legitimacy by perpetuating exaggerated claims of violence and elaborate stories of conquering evil, fueled by sensational media (Corva, 2013). These claims were used to bolster public support for CAMP raids and contributed to a perception that violence and cannabis agriculture were directly related (Corva, 2013: 3). The result emboldened a rural policing

effort, focused on the “greatest threat to national security” – the hippie communities of Northern California.

Not only were CAMP's motivations challenged, but their techniques were also called into question as the raids veered from constitutional parameters. The discourse surrounding CAMP and the broader “war on drugs” became an opportunity for law enforcement to disregard the Bill of Rights (Miranda, 1998: 69). CAMP teams utilized unconstitutional methods – they did not read citizens their rights before detaining them, raided homes and gardens without search warrants, and terrorized communities with low flying helicopters and unquestioned federal backing (Raphael, 1985; Corva, 2013: 4). The Deputy Commander, during CAMP's formative years, boldly stated, “Just the act of having marijuana grown on your land is enough to tie it up; then you have to turn around and prove that you're innocent. It reverses the burden of proof” (Raphael, 1985: 105). A Mattole resident recalled,

Copter jockeys – those cats were good and all 'Nam trained. I had one chase me through Honeydew Creek and that sucker was good; he was below the treetops. The majority of policemen were pulled from Southern California and they got to play Rambo-camo, jumping from helicopters – and everyone knows hippies don't shoot back – instead of policing another hot summer in East LA where those suckers do shoot back (Mirthan-Nelson, personal interview, 2016).

Based on this system of policing the citizenry, every person was considered a potential drug violator. Advanced tactics were used to address violators and escalated to land seizure. Using civil penalties such as asset forfeiture, the government seized, without due process, the property of people who were suspected, “but not convicted or even formally accused, of drug-related activities” (Miranda, 1998: 69). These practices of land

and plant confiscation, with only a shell of due process to fall back on, shook the community and abstracted the discourse surrounding cannabis cultivation, state power, and delinquency. The seizure of assets further denied access to due process as it prevented suspects from using their own money to hire lawyers for their defense, a requirement that continues to this day. These practices dramatically affected mom and pop growers who described hosting community events, selling all of their belongings, and relying on the letter writing efforts of their neighbors in an attempt to defend their cases.

One of the first residents in the Mattole Valley to be arrested by CAMP described the experience of being raided,

They jumped out of their vehicles with their guns and their camos on. I was sleeping upstairs. And I heard all of the commotion and so I tried to get my pants on. A cop came in my bedroom door and he was shaking. He was shaking with a gun in his hand and he said, “How many people are here?”

I said, “Two!” and he said, “Wrong!”

I said, “Oh...my stepson is here. Three!”

They put a gun to my 13-year-old’s head. They said, “If you move we will blow your brains out.” *Thirteen*. It was the first time they were trying out land confiscation. They said they would not prosecute less than 30 plants. So we made sure we had less than 30. We culled plants. It didn’t matter. They lied (Cohen, A., personal interview, 2016).

The suppression of the countercultural community emerged out of years of social control, under the guise of drug control policy. In the context of the Mattole community, this insertion of the state was a strategic response to the politically and socially conscientious people who engaged in cannabis cultivation as an act of rebellion, subsistence, and economic necessity.

The physical assault of law enforcement had multiple effects. Not only did arrest plague the minds of the residents, but the concern of person, property, and privacy further contributed to what philosopher Michel Foucault described as “the carceral.” The carceral is an incarcerated or prison-like culture which creates an incarcerated populace; not always physically, but ideologically. Foucault (1995: 299–300) expanded on this notion,

[A] certain significant generality moved between the least irregularity and the greatest crime; it was no longer the offense, the attack on the common interest, it was the departure from the norm, the anomaly; it was this that haunted the school, the court, the asylum or the prison. It generalized in the sphere of meaning the function that the carceral generalized in the sphere of tactics. Replacing the adversary of the sovereign, the social enemy was transformed into a deviant, who brought with him the multiple danger of disorder, crime and madness.

The departure from the norm, a notion embraced by counterculture participants, would be wielded by the state as a “crime” in a continued ideological and physical war against dissenters. The language of “madness” and “disorder” has been used throughout the cannabis eradication campaign, demonstrating a departure from dominant society in a way that needed to be remedied or punished. In this manner, those who have not adhered to political, economic, or cultural norms have been targeted by the doctrine of the drug war.

The implications of this process are detrimental not only at a local level, but to national movements. When minorities and those “on the fringes” are incarcerated at devastating rates, this results in a blow to social mobilization and activism. The precedent of jailing members of the underclass for drug or gang related charges was “set during the 1960s and 1970s when many radicals (such as Timothy Leary and Abbie Hoffman) were arrested or forced underground over trivial drug charges” (Miranda, 1998: 70). Such

oppression deters social activism and discourages visibility of membership; when organization participants are repeatedly incarcerated, the momentum of the movement is threatened. In this way, “the government neutralizes potential dissidents through a campaign of police repression against minorities and the underclass under the cover of drug enforcement” (Miranda, 1998: 73).

Foucault analyzed the creation of delinquency as a tool of the state to prove its power and worth (Foucault, 1995). The shifting and flexible definition of delinquency creates an insecure populace, existing under threat of incarceration. Foucault explained, “In the illegalities, the police-prison system segments a manipulable delinquency. This delinquency, with its specificity, is a result of the system; but it also becomes a part and instrument of it” (Foucault, 1995: 282). Thus, the state creates the possibility for delinquency and at the same time, delinquency serves the interests of the state. This is seen in the way that the state polices nebulous forms of violence, said to be rampant through the citizenry. Drug control serves as an unwinnable war; a constant source of threat, without clarity on what winning the war might mean.

When the enemy becomes an element of society which only the state can suppress, advanced tactics are enacted against the citizenry. The policies of zero tolerance, drug testing, and asset forfeiture under Reagan played out for decades in Northern California (Miranda, 1998; Raphael, 1985). As Corva (2013) noted, the statewide sentiment was complicit with rural policing efforts. The fantasized repeal of the Bill of Rights aligned with the needs of dominant society insofar as it kept citizens safe from “violent offenders.” However, this was not unique to the cannabis farmers of the

Emerald Triangle; across America, the de facto suspension of the fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh, and eighth Amendments to the U.S. Constitution are yet today an integral part of anti-drug policing strategies (Miranda, 1998: 69). Thus, the policing effort against Northern California communities exposes philosophies and methods rampant across this nation.

Evaluating the government's methods of incarceration, Foucault articulated, "By virtue, of its methods of fixing, dividing, recording, it has been one of the simplest, crudest, also most concrete, but perhaps most indispensable conditions of the development of this immense activity of examination that has objectified human behavior" (Foucault, 1995: 305). By way of surveillance and reduction of human agency, the state allows for the physical arrest of the body, as well as the continued observation of the citizenry (Foucault, 1995: 304). Contributing to this perpetual observation, under the Reagan administration, the number of incarcerated persons doubled in the United States, the focus on cannabis arrests accounting for the majority of drug arrests and convictions (Lee, 2012: 190). Furthermore, between 1995 and 2005 thirteen million Americans were arrested for cannabis, typically for possession (Lee, 2012: 337).<sup>20</sup> However, the war against Northern California cannot be more perfectly summarized than by Operation "Green Sweep." In 1990, Operation Green Sweep marked a deployment of Federal and National Guard troops against Northern California marijuana growers (Miranda, 1998:

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<sup>20</sup> Lee (2012: 337) put cannabis arrests into perspective: "In 2006, there were 829,625 marijuana arrests, an average of one every forty-one seconds. By the year's end, approximately one out of every hundred adults in the United States was behind bars."

69). As author Joseph Miranda (1998: 69) contended, “Except for urban riots, Green Sweep represents one of the few uses of military force against American citizens in recent times and it differs from civil disturbances in that the Federal Government took the initiative and went over to the offensive rather than responding to a breakdown of local authority.” Through a violation of rights, a culture of surveillance, and the physical invasion of communities, the state exercised its might against the dissenting culture.

With this assault by the government to regain control, anti-government sentiment amplified across the Mattole Valley. Both new settlers and the traditional community rejected the insertion of the state in the region. Resident Andrea Cohen asserted,

Everybody hated the government, hated the CAMP, hated any government interference, and hated the BLM. You know? They were outlaws out there. All the old ranchers were outlaws. They didn't want the government. They were taking the beaches away from us, restricting our use. They'd put those logs out there so that we couldn't drive out to the beach; we'd burn them down. They'd put in the camp spots and the kids would burn them down. There was more cohesion between the old-timers and the newcomers around that time (personal interview, 2016).

Though the government worked to eradicate cannabis, the increased risk of plant eradication due to CAMP policies outshined by new market potential produced a “green rush.” Based on Corva's (2013) analysis, predicated on ethnographic data collection and collaborative reports, the price per pound doubled between 1983, the year CAMP was established, and 1986. This would situate the price per pound at 4,000 dollars. While understandably difficult to pin down or verify in terms of consistency, Corva's data has been supported through triangulation with local researchers. In this work, Corva graphed the price of cannabis reaching \$4,500 in 1989 and hovering above \$4,000 until 1999



when the price reached \$5,000 per pound. The reports of prices are based on community recounts and therefore are not “accurate, but they are precise” (Corva, 2013).<sup>21</sup> However, even on the conservative side, the price increase was somewhere between 50% and 150%, compared to 1983 prices, or 2,400% when comparing the lowest price of \$200 per pound to the highest average price paid in 1999 of \$5,000 (Corva, 2013).

The payout was enough to draw other growers to the area. The California Geographical Society report indicated an increase in cannabis production during 1987, due in part to the abundance of growers establishing themselves in the area (Leeper, 1990: 104). The increase in Humboldt County’s production was estimated between twenty-five and forty percent by the county sheriff during the 1980s (Raphael, 1985: 113). With this blossoming economy, growers were inspired to increase their plant counts to capture the rising prices; mono-cropping, covert water diversion, and indoor adaptations changed the very nature of the plant.

Yet the perpetuation of cannabis agriculture emerged as a double-edged sword; while on the one hand cannabis was a tool for new settlers to pursue their lives in the Mattole Valley, the development of the cannabis industry presented significant social, cultural, and environmental challenges. In response to CAMP’s aggressive actions and the spotlight of the national media, growers began looking for new ways to hide their operations from overhead surveillance and each other. The implications of this process resulted in increased isolation; residents stopped telling each other the truth and the influx

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<sup>21</sup> It should also be noted that while these numbers reflect the average prices, some residents recounted receiving as much as \$6,000 in the late 1980s, years before the region saw peak prices.

of cannabis prioritization challenged the bioregional consciousness of the community. It was a new era in the community's development; big money and fear threatened the whole valley (House, 1999: 189).

Beginning in the 1980s when CAMP was most heavily financed and raids were frequent, the indoor scene was viewed as a resilient adaptation to CAMP policies. However, this indoor production introduced new approaches to cultivation. The use of diesel generators, though less likely to be used by the earth conscious new settlers, became a prevalent tool of second-generation growers as they moved their products into greenhouses and other enclosed structures (Corva, 2013). Alongside generators, the use of synthetic additives, pesticides, indoor lighting, ballasts (for limiting electrical currents), and metal housing became features of the mutating industry.

This was new ground in the 1980s, yet the residual effects of this industry adaptation are prevalent today. Karen August (2012: 41) commented on the abundance of grow stores in Humboldt County, finding in some cases the number of grow stores exceeds the number of supermarkets. Though the Mattole community does not have this commercial presence in terms of retail establishments, it was not insulated from these changes. Indoor growing allowed producers to manipulate the seasons of plant productivity, which led to a year-round harvest cycle. The industry changes dramatically affected the intention behind production and the methods of cultivation.

After more than a decade of CAMP raids and assaults on growers, legislation for medicinal use of cannabis turned the black market a lighter shade of grey. In 1996, California was the first state to legalize cannabis for medical use under California Proposition 215 (Prop 215) (Aldinger, 2015: 34). The effect of Proposition 215, alongside Senate Bill (SB) 420, led cannabis agriculture and enforcement into new territory (Corva, 2013: 8). While Prop 215 allowed for the use of medical cannabis by patients, SB 420 allowed local areas to set their own limits on garden sizes and afforded rights to patients who held medical cards for themselves and others (Corva, 2013). The Humboldt County Board of Supervisors limited garden sizes to ninety-nine plants, one plant below the federal mandatory minimum sentencing line. This allowed cardholders to grow ninety-nine plants; however, there was no law against growing ninety-nine plants for yourself, as a cardholder, and ninety-nine plants for a cardholder friend. As long as growers had documentation of growing for other 215 cardholders, farm sizes could be significantly larger than the ninety-nine plant limit (Corva, 2013: 8). Thus, growers formed cooperatives with multiple cards. This resulted in an ambiguous time of pseudo-legality where farmers could grow cannabis under the medical parameters set in place by the State of California, but were still not protected from arrest for possession or transport. Again, the burden of proof would be placed on patients, growers, and cannabis users, maintaining the legacy of CAMP.

Today, Humboldt County continues to dance around the legal grey area of state and federal regulation (Corva, 2013: 8). In an attempt to protect themselves and their

communities, people have started to mobilize.<sup>22</sup> Over the past few years, local marijuana growers and activists, led by the political action group California Cannabis Voice-Humboldt (CCVH), worked to legitimize the industry by drafting legislation, packing the Board of Supervisors chambers, and encouraging farmers to step out of the shadows and take steps toward regulation (Burns, 2015). Involved in the Mattole due to member support in the area, CCVH walked the line between secrecy and advocacy. Yet as the group gained traction, law enforcement responded. In June of 2015, raids of CCVH members' farms caused feelings of betrayal among the advocates (Burns, 2015). While the raids did not occur in the heart of the Mattole, this type of police presence was a throwback to the CAMP raids that targeted activist community members starting in the 1980s. After these raids occurred, Hezekiah Allen, the executive director of the Emerald Growers Association – an organization focused on lobbying the state government, summarized:

Today they say they are looking for “environmental impacts,” and “water theft.” But these new words ring hollow. Because this is the same type of activity that traumatized me and the children of our community at an early age. This is the same type of activity that has broken families and plagued communities. The environmental impacts are very real and we need to address them. But this is the same war that they have been fighting for decades.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> In the early 1980s, citizen groups formed in response to CAMP. The Mountain Message Service (MMS) operated in Southern Humboldt and Northern Mendocino to announce police actions and civil liberty violations (using CB radios). MMS evolved into Citizens Observation Group (COG) where volunteer observers, similar to a neighborhood watch, would document warrantless searches, seizures and destruction of non-cannabis-related property, intimidation, excessive use of force, and detention of community bystanders at bust sites. In 1984, the Civil Liberties Monitoring Project (CLMP) was formed. CLMP put together legal protection teams and worked with law enforcement to situate COG teams at busts (Butler, 2015).

<sup>23</sup> Hezekiah Allen wrote this response on a personal Facebook page June 23, 2015, <https://www.facebook.com/hezekiah.allen/posts/1005446816153832>

On October 9, 2015, California passed Assembly Bill 243, Assembly Bill 266, and Senate Bill 643, which collectively comprise the Medical Marijuana Regulation and Safety Act. These three bills established a legal framework for cannabis cultivation, manufacturing, distribution, transportation, sales, and testing, effectively answering the call for oversight and regulation of medical cannabis. Local groups working to extend the laws of the medical industry and set up guidelines for general cannabis cultivation celebrated this important step; however, the laws only addressed medical production and distribution. Finally, in the fall of 2016, California voters turned out at the polls to legalize recreational cannabis. Despite this recent development, the process of regulation and legal “compliance” of grows to environmental and policy standards continues to complicate the industry; thus, the future of cannabis agriculture remains unclear.

Following medical cannabis regulation, industry standards, and the new frontier of legal recreational cannabis, the “mom and pop” (small-scale) cannabis producers in remote watersheds face new challenges. With the development of a capitalist cannabis industry, small farmers are being *weeded out*; prices have dropped and the future of the small-scale grower is precarious. As one Mattole resident lamented, “If you want the same amount of money, and you’re no longer getting five grand a pound, so then you need to grow five times as much. That’s what everybody did. The greenhouse phenomena, the amount of pot, and the number of people growing pot – it just mushroomed” (Cohen, A., personal interview, 2016). The rebels have been pushed further out to the edges, but the industry has also triggered a re-entry into the mainstream society they so thoroughly rejected (Brady, 2014; Raphael, 1985). In addressing the

social, cultural, and environmental implications of cannabis agriculture, residents continue to navigate the terrain between ideologies, either bioregionally based or in thrall to global capitalist norms.

## THEORETICAL APPROACH

"Who controls the past controls the future: who controls the present controls the past" (Orwell, 1949).

"The ability to ignore unwanted facts is one of the prerogatives of unchallenged power. Closely related is the right to radically revise history" (Chomsky, 2014).

### Epistemology

The investigation into this topic area and the literature surrounding bioregionalism and cannabis forced me to reconcile my understanding of power and knowledge. It has always been my belief that knowledge is based on lived experience and that education develops into knowledge when complemented by personal awareness and exploration. For instance, someone can describe the seasonal changes of the Pacific Northwest, but to have knowledge of these transitions, you must stand witness to this process, feel the rain, and see the vibrant greens. Pursuing knowledge is not an integral feature of academia. Academia's general epistemological approach tends to reward the exchange of information and information acquisition. Knowledge, on the other hand, is a critical component of knowing; knowledge expands and deepens education and fosters understanding that is more honest. In this section, I describe the intersections of subjective and objective truth, unpack the epistemological approach used for this research, and introduce the phenomenological lens that assisted my research process.

Stepping outside of the philosophical musing of truth facilitated in a classroom, I argue that truth, the notion of truth, is based on power and that knowledge is something

held by us all. I challenge the existence of a dichotomy between objective and subjective truth, for if we continue to pursue a notion of objective truth, we silence and marginalize those who dissent. Cognitive linguist George Lakoff contended, “[T]he idea that there is absolute objective truth is not only mistaken but socially and politically dangerous” (Lakoff, 1980: 159). Objective truth forces an absolutist approach, which buries countering awareness.

This exposure of the political and social implications of truth construction is reaffirmed in discussions of the 1960s. In following social movements from the 1960s to today, activist and politician Tom Hayden identified “managed memory” as a way in which singular or dominant perceptions of history become objective and absolutist, specifically in relation to the national amnesia of vibrant, progressive forces (Hayden, 2009: 16). Managed memory is seen in the way social movements are restructured by the dominant to reinforce the “exceptionalism of the American political system,” diminishing the role such movements play and the critique inherent in their formation (Hayden, 2009: 16). A central feature of managed memory is the control over narrative via educational curricula, as these stories inform the collective memory of younger generations. Recognizing this feature of domination, the Sixties movements challenged the curricula of academic institutions, in a fight over memory that has persisted to this day. Bringing to the surface discourses masked by dominant literature counters the historical management of memory, the absolutist approach to truth, and dogmatic stories of the American system.



Recognizing the use of metaphor in the creation of understanding and memory, Lakoff explained, “[M]ost of our indirect understanding involves understanding *one kind* of entity or experience in terms of *another kind*—that is, understanding via metaphor” (original emphasis Lakoff, 1980: 178). While this aids in our daily interpretations of the world, metaphor also is used to establish truth. In the history of the Mattole, we see examples of metaphor being used throughout; the “war on drugs,” for instance, demonstrates a metaphor in creating an image of a war in the abstract and then applying it to drug eradication, which also happens to be abstract and symbolic, yet manifests physically through violence against communities. Linguistic philosopher Noam Chomsky provided a fitting example of this metaphorical process: “In some parts of the world the United States ranks even higher as a perceived menace to world peace, notably in the Middle East, where overwhelming majorities regard the U.S. and its close ally Israel as the major threats they face, not the U.S.-Israeli favorite: Iran” (Chomsky, 2014). This challenges a common metaphor in dominant discourse, the U.S. as the world peacekeeper or global police. In this way, metaphor is not just a literary technique, but is applicable to our daily lives as the basis for perception, understanding, and reaffirmation of the validity of the subjective experience.

Further challenging the dominant assumption of objective truth, the theoretical lens of phenomenology encourages an investigation of truth through a reliance on subjective experiences in the sensuous world. Cultural ecologist and philosopher David Abram explored this concept: “In contrast to the apparently unlimited, global character of the technologically mediated world, the sensuous world—the world of our direct,

unmediated interactions—is always local” (Abram, 1996: 266). Documenting oral histories as a method of data collection, the lived stories, experiences, and perceptions of my participants are a critical component of truth creation. While these narratives are abstracted from their home in the Mattole Valley as I transcribe them and situate them on these pages, I do so in an attempt to celebrate the actual space of the Mattole, the river, the land, the people, and the nonhuman life forms that reside there. While the story of the Mattole Valley is more fully understood at the feet of towering trees, walking through native grasslands, and searching for a fish rise in the Mattole River, the collection of these experiences provides a version of truth, based on the knowledge of the residents who made their journey there. I rely on the local knowledge of the residents I interviewed and celebrate the ecological narratives that aid in a creation of the Valley’s truth.

### Theoretical Lens

My methodological approach for this project started with sociologist Kathy Charmaz’ framework of constructivist grounded theory. Grounded theory can be understood as engaging with “an unfolding story”; the researcher develops, studies, and shapes the emerging story, drawing on the insights gleaned from their involvement with the research (Charmaz, 2005: 690). Professor of Educational Psychology John W. Creswell explained how the framework fits “squarely within the interpretive approach to qualitative research with flexible guidelines, a focus on theory developed that depends on the researcher's view, learning about the experience within embedded, hidden networks,

situations, and relationships, and making visible hierarchies of power, communication, and opportunity” (Creswell, 2007). This contributes to the acknowledgement of the researcher’s role in shaping the outcomes of the study (Charmaz, 2005). If we consider the relationships developed during research as key to the outcome of the story, then the researcher’s view is central to the work.

The constructivist approach to grounded theory sees data and analysis as created through the shared experiences of the researcher and participants, as well as through the relationship between researcher and participant (Charmaz, 2005: 677; Charmaz, 1990, 1995b, 2000; Charmaz & Mitchell, 1996, 2001). Through collaboration with community members, I developed my methods and began my exploration into this topic area. With such a wealth of expertise and knowledge in the Mattole Valley, grounded theory supported my attempt to engage community members as co-researchers and to take direction from participants regarding study formation and implementation. Finally, grounded theory supports the bridge into advocacy work, as the researcher may choose to illuminate the historical, economic, and social conditions, which influence a particular set of processes (Creswell, 2007). In recognizing the tools provided by constructivist grounded theory, I feel strongly that my methodological framework is best suited to my particular research journey, and synergistically aligns with my values and beliefs, as well as those of my interviewees.

My constructivist grounded theory approach was supplemented by applying a phenomenological lens. David Abram (1996: 32) said of this approach to data collection, “Despite all the mechanical artifacts that now surround us, the world in which we find

ourselves before we set out to calculate and measure it is not an inert or mechanical object but a living field, an open and dynamic landscape subject to its own moods and metamorphoses.” Abram’s interpretation stems from a belief in the collaboration of senses as integral to perceiving our experiences, a process reinforced by many of the participants in this research (1996: 204).

A phenomenological approach seeks understanding of the common or shared experiences of a phenomenon by several people (Creswell, 2007: 60). To apply this to the study of the new settlers’ experiences in establishing themselves in the Mattole Valley, I sought an understanding of the new settlers’ rationale behind making their home in the Valley and the evolution of their beliefs and values in this specific location. While this does not differ tremendously from the flexible nature of constructivist grounded theory, nor the significance of subjective experience, phenomenology goes a few steps further in the incorporation of diverse perceptions. Abram (1996: 39) interpreted:

The “real world” in which we find ourselves, then – the very world our sciences strive to fathom – is not a sheer “object,” not a fixed and finished “datum” from which all subjects and subjective qualities could be pared away, but is rather an intertwined matrix of sensations and perceptions, a collective field of experience lived through from many different angles. The mutual inscription of others in my experience, and (as I must assume) of myself in their experiences, effects the interweaving of our individual phenomenal fields into a single, ever-shifting fabric, a single phenomenal world or “reality.”

Through my research, I employed a variety of different methods for data collection. By living, feeling, and sensing my way through my research process, I expanded on the dialectical relationship between researcher and interviewee; I integrated diverse modes of participation and perception, aligning with Abram’s celebration of the

“concerted activity of all the body’s senses as they function and flourish together” (1996: 59). In applying these understandings of the world to scientific or research processes, French phenomenological philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty echoed, “All my knowledge of the world, even my scientific knowledge, is gained from my own particular point of view, or from some experience of the world without which the symbols of science would be meaningless” (as cited in Abram, 1996: 36). This approach, integrating sensuous perceptions of the world and interactions around us, strengthens reliance on the lived experiences of my research participants and affirms the incorporation of a variety of methodological approaches, not only serving to triangulate the research, but further establishing a picture of the Mattole new settler community that remains rooted in direct human experience (Abram, 1996: 41).

## Methodology

The focus of this research was to engage with the stories of the Mattole Valley and to draw specific lessons in terms of counterculture, cannabis, and capitalism. Through collecting stories from residents who moved to the area during the back-to-the-land movement, I wanted to reach a better understanding of the relationships in the Valley and the experiences of the new settlers. In order to add layers to my findings, I incorporated oral history, semi-structured interviews, participant observation, document analysis, and archival research. Based on my experience, these methods are not rigid categories, but converging and overlapping processes. Many of the residents in the

Mattole Valley have written extensively on their experiences, each serving as a historical reference – plays, videos, pamphlets, poetry, and journal articles included. Because of the visibility of the watershed restoration and forest defense work, many Mattole community members have also been the focus of interviews and articles over the last few decades. I see the information provided in the interviews as being no different from the data collected in published books, or what would be considered more formal settings. My interviewees are academics in traditional and non-traditional capacities. In the following paragraphs, I describe my process for data collection and the manner in which this story emerged.

#### Incorporating oral histories and semi-structured interviews

I first visited the Mattole Valley during a class field trip with my graduate cohort at Humboldt State University in 2015. As a bonding experience and an introduction to social science graduate work, we participated in a weeklong intensive exploration of the Mattole Valley. The topics we explored incorporated place-based education, restoration initiatives, and community development, all while camping on the banks of the Mattole River. We had the opportunity to join community meetings and campfire chats, hike in the forest, explore the beaches and ridgetops, and visit homes and property. It was during a visit with a local rancher that I first wondered, “What the heck is a Berkeley graduate doing here raising cattle? And, why is this story not an anomaly here?” It was intriguing to come across an isolated community in a California watershed with such a politically active and highly educated populace. After discovering that the rancher had moved to the Mattole following some activist work in San Francisco during the Sixties I asked, “Do

you see your lifestyle as an extension of the political philosophy you studied at Berkeley?” To which he replied, “Yes.” I realized then that I had more questions for the residents.

After the initial visit, I expressed my interest in the community to one of the trip coordinators, Mattole resident Flora Brain. Flora emailed a handful of residents in the Mattole with my expressed interest in social activism. Laura Cooskey, who manages the Mattole Valley Historical Society, responded to my email and we met up to talk about the potential project. Laura had compiled a list of new settlers in the Mattole Valley to begin a similar research project and generously provided me with names and phone numbers to begin my research. I expanded on the list with the assistance of others, identifying additional residents who could reflect on the new settlers’ experience. Having lived in Northern California for a few years, I found that my connection with the region fostered easy connections and made me a more trustworthy researcher. Many people have reflected on their arrival in Northern California and their missteps, falling into the pattern of asking people what they do for a living. Since many people grow cannabis as their primary occupation, this question tends to be in poor taste. I integrated into Humboldt County in a nontraditional manner and was already sensitive to many of the social dynamics of the area. Additionally, my connection with Laura Cooskey, a longtime resident of the Mattole, significantly softened the insider-outsider distinction.

Prior to starting the interview schedule, I introduced myself in a Google group commonly used for communication in the valley. Through this introduction of my research and myself, I encouraged individuals to reach out to me to set up interviews. I

was able to connect with community members this way and had people suggest others to contact. By emailing and calling potential respondents, I set up interviews in the Mattole Valley and in Arcata, California. My interview schedule featured a set of guiding questions and topics, but participants were encouraged to elaborate on topics that were important to them, as well as to guide the conversation towards new and unexpected areas. I presented a written consent form to each of my interviewees, which at times was chuckled at (due to the formality), but always consented to. On my consent form, I asked for permission to record the session. I tape recorded all of the interviews, took detailed notes, and completed the process with full transcriptions.

#### Participant observation

Oral histories provided a unique lens for research and allowed me to engage with many other elements in conjunction with the stories being shared. Participant observation was conducted while visiting the homes of my interviewees or in another interview location. Not only did I share meals with families, meet relatives, friends, and animals, but I spent time observing and exploring the spaces I was in. Looking at pictures, books, mementos, and the homes of my participants provided me with a better understanding of the lives and philosophies of the people I interviewed. I had a chance to meet children, help with household chores, and cook meals with families. I camped on people's property, setting up my tent under orchards and surrounded by the sounds of the Mattole. I attended community events, participated in dropping kids off at summer camps, and drove extensively through the area. All of these activities provided me with a better understanding of the community and the dynamics of life in the Valley. After



participating in these activities, I wrote in a journal and reflected on my experiences, many times while sitting on the edge of the river or on the sandy beaches of the Pacific Ocean.

#### Document analysis and archival research

My approach to document analysis included literature from a variety of different sources. Over the last two years, I searched extensively for pieces of information about the Mattole. I uncovered secondary information through the Humboldt County Historical Society in Eureka, California, and the Humboldt Room in the HSU Library. I used newspaper clippings and leaflets produced by Mattole residents about their own experiences in the early days of the new settler presence. These resources included the *Steelhead Special*, a newspaper produced in Eureka, California, which dedicated an issue to the writings of Mattole watershed residents, and *New Settler* magazine, where some of my respondents have been featured in full-length interviews. I went through newspaper excerpts, pictures, the Mattole Google group, and other archival documents in order to get a better understanding of the community's history. Laura Cooskey sent me numerous articles from the Mattole Valley Historical Society that described the events of the Valley and featured supplemental interviews with the residents.

The diversity of methods I chose strengthened the research process and established different platforms from which I interpreted the data. However, the information available created a focused investigation. The pieces contributed to a more fully formed picture of the Mattole and mandated patience and openness in the process. After engaging with the methods described above, I analyzed the interviews and oral

histories, drew insights from the publications of the residents, and worked to describe, compare, and contrast the collection of perspectives. What I found led me on a journey in my own self and transformed my understanding of graduate work.

## RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

The narratives of the new settlers have been woven throughout this story. Each oral history and semi-structured interview, article, piece of poetry, song, story, picture, and feeling entangled itself in the preceding chapters. The basis of my connection to this history was informed by the conversations and moments of sharing, so graciously afforded to me. This chapter calls on these findings, further revealing the experiences of the new settlers and providing additional analysis of this process. My interviewees were all different; each contributed their own experiences and beliefs to this project. However, there were overlapping and emerging themes.

These themes were reinforced through the literature surrounding this location and authored by the resident Mattolians. Through my research, I saw the findings converging beneath two overarching subjects – bioregionalism and cannabis. Under the umbrella of bioregionalism, conversations were organized around the subtopics of the spirituality of reinhabitation, restoration, and perceptions of activism. Cannabis serves the story as a space of contestation in regard to many of these bioregional components, illuminating the economic implications of cannabis agriculture, the suppression of freedom of speech, and effects on the body, regarding both the earth and humanity. In uniting these two themes, lessons for the future emerge from the conversations. For example, through the research, cannabis was exposed as a type of testing ground for the philosophical underpinnings of bioregionalism and global capitalism. Thus, discussions of cannabis agriculture are synonymous with conversations of economics and relationships with place. While I

provide an outline of themes, they should not be seen as rigid categories, but fluid and converging elements. In recognizing the influence from one area on another, the themes contribute to a clearer view of the explorative process and aid in answering the guiding questions of this research.

Before presenting my findings, I would like to acknowledge my privilege in being able to conduct this research and share this experience. The results of my research are challenging of normative structures of power, of which academia is a feature. Traditionally silencing voices of dissent, the capitalist-imperialist-patriarchal system dominates the ways in which people organize against oppression and discourages narratives which counter dominant projections. As both a woman and a person who engages in community organizing and activism, I have experienced the struggle within academia to seek solutions which challenge the top-down structure of power. I am fortunate to find myself in a position where I can describe these processes of domination and be afforded a legitimacy by my degree, a privilege denied to so many others. As a believer in the power and connectedness of movements, I see this work as another drop of water in the ocean of socio-cultural transformation. It is through recognizing my position, my privilege, and my opportunity to contribute to this discussion that I present these findings.

## Bioregionalism

“We had a utopia idea; we were going to make a utopia” (Taylor, personal interview, 2016).

“One of the most important things to us moving out here was that we never leave. The definition of sustainable is that you don’t move. Unspoken commitment. This is the last move, that’s it” (Evenson, personal interview, 2016).

### The spirituality of reinhabitation

For the Mattole residents, the watershed, the Valley, and the location of their homes have a tremendous impact on their experiences. Sitting underneath apple trees, smelling the rich, earthy air of the Douglas-fir forests, feeling the sun warm your skin on a summer day, experiences like these during my visits helped me to understand the overt love of the Valley. The black, rocky sand of the coast made me feel small and at the whim of the earth as I gazed out at the expansiveness of both the beach and ocean. While many described the beauty of the environment as a reason for making the Mattole Valley their home, most told stories of a deeper connection; in each of my interviews, a sense of spirituality, consistent with reinhabitation literature, emerged as a central theme. Resident Melanie Mirthan-Nelson captured this spirituality in describing the decision to stay in the Valley:

A lot of new immigrants like me just ended up here and found safe haven. Most of us initially didn't come in with enough to go as far as that handshake. And, at some point in that time, just about all of us had to ask themselves, “What in the hell am I doing here? I have no job, no place to live – at least out there in the jungle I have my survival skills. And, this place is so nice I don't even need my survival skills. What am I doing?” It was something, the spirit of this place. I camped down by the river; I was allowed to camp there as long as I didn't make a mess and bring anybody down. I was standing there one morning and it was calm,

and it was probably the first spiritual moment I ever had. And it was something...I call it the spirit of the Mattole. She picks her people and always has picked her people. I knew right then, I'm here for whatever. Almost all of us have a story like that out here (personal interview, 2016).

This commonality unified the residents' stories of the watershed and became a starting point for conversation about the Mattole. It was the daffodils, the enchanting landscape, the Mattole River, the sight of spawning salmon; each of these stories revealed a connectedness the residents felt for the land as they arrived in the Valley. Former resident Andrea Cohen explained how the drive into the Mattole paralleled a vision from San Francisco:

In San Francisco, I did a weaving for a bank. It was a triptych. There were three big weavings; they were 8 feet by 8 feet. It was a mountain; that was the first one. Then, the mountain coming down with an eagle owl. The third one was the mountain going down to the sea with the sun or the moon. This got hung up at a Union Bank in San Francisco. Anyway, I had just finished that when I went up and met my friend. She said, "You've got to go to Petrolia." And, when you come down, where Ocean House is and you're on that stretch and you see the ridge; it was just like the weaving. Save for the eagle owl, which I saw later. I was like, "Oh my god, it's the weaving." I mean obviously I was fated to being there; it was my destiny (personal interview, 2016).

Resident Michael Evenson added humor to the equation, but still identified a deeper calling to commit one's self to the Mattole. Working in real estate, Evenson recollected:

When I was doing that real estate thing I got to see all of the people coming up here. I was in a pivotal role there. There were some people I really didn't like and I'd hike them farthest back through rugged poison oak and back. And then there would be other people who you knew would be a good fit. It was really interesting; sometimes people would say, "I don't have the money," but they would say they wanted to live here. Then you would have other people who had jobs but they would say, "We really can't see how we could live out here," and they wouldn't buy land. It was a time for people to trust their hearts. Some were driven by some unforeseen force (personal interview, 2016).

As previously explored in the context of reinhabitation work, a spiritual connection with a place becomes a binding element between human and nonhuman life. The experiences of the new settlers with the landscape further developed their bioregional philosophy; they were eager to care for the land and find a way to expand their role in the Valley, beyond physical occupation. Their association with bioregional philosophy created a lens for exploring this new area. In alignment with the counterculture movement of San Francisco, residents honed their awareness of nonhuman dynamics using mind-expanding substances. This provided for a resensitization of their relationship with the natural world, which had been lost or never fully known, and became a feature of culture in the Mattole Valley.

Since the 1970s, many newcomers to the area have shared this connection to the fish, the trees, the river, and the landscape. Michael Evenson explained how some community members have developed such an intimacy with nonhuman life that it resembles what a native inhabitant might feel towards the land (personal interview, 2016). Pointing to the academic shifts occurring at Humboldt State University (HSU), just two hours away, Evenson described the professors who have encouraged students to explore the world around them, pursuing a relationship that transcends management and prioritizes humans as an integral part of the land, with a responsibility for the health of the bioregion and the planet.

Melanie Mirthan-Nelson explained the converging dynamics and their contribution to local culture:

You have all of these different influences with one commonality and the one commonality is a deep-seated commitment and love for this space. Until 1996, when they passed Prop 215, really the only reason to be here was because you loved it, despite of the fact that you couldn't make a living; you were taking an economic hit; you were living forty years technically behind the rest of the dominant culture and everyone in your family who didn't live here thought you were crazy for living here. And that provided the common basis for which a lot of very diverse mindsets were able to fuse this incredible community (personal interview, 2016).

The love of the landscape transcended ideological lines, created a space for restoration work, and formed a bond between community members. While the influence of the cannabis economy is explored later in this discussion, it is important to recognize the shared love of the landscape. The love of the Mattole Valley serves as a unifying force and a baseline for community engagement.

#### Negotiating a bioregional philosophy through restoration work

Community projects brought residents closer together and have continued to shape the identity of the Mattole Valley new settlers. One momentous undertaking involved the transport of the old school hall across the street to house the new Community Center. From the beginning, no project seemed insurmountable. The collaboration of effort translated to unprecedented restoration work. What started as “pirate restoration,” an unpermitted engagement with environmental systems, created a foundation for bioregionally minded community action (personal interview, 2016). David Simpson recalled,

We were trying to dig into Humboldt County, before we owned land. We were part of a very conscious political and philosophical movement that was based on an effort to reinhabit a countryside and help develop communities that were appropriate to the place, and provided for itself and each other without exploiting the landscape quite so intensely as the logging boom had. So all these ideas were



current at the same time that we were moving back to the land (personal interview, 2016).

While the new settlers may not have understood the subtleties of the natural systems they set out to restore, the projects grew from an idea that what was natural would work. Resident Michael Evenson explained, “I think one of the motivating principles was if it is natural, it is good – of the community forming. If you were close and in touch with the land, and somewhat pure of heart, not over-extracting resources, you end up doing good stuff” (personal interview, 2016).

Bioregional thought was developing as a challenge to dominant ideology, a way of countering the aforementioned trends in mainstream America. However, the challenges of implementation materialized when ideological lines crossed. The new settlers were not trying to facilitate a new, community-wide lifestyle; however, they were trying to change the way the land was managed. While this was not a direct threat to traditional livelihoods, the manner in which the restoration projects came about did challenge the established community. When the restoration organizations were developed, primary funding came from government grants. Hostility over government involvement bristled the ranching community’s perception of restoration work. One resident encapsulated the contentious feelings of the ranching community in a story about David Simpson and T.K. Clark. Clark, “who was the epitome of a hill-rancher and proud of the fact that one of his ancestors had killed the last Indian or something like that,” would see David Simpson coming and say, “Here comes General Grant, by god!”

(personal interview, 2016). This quotation illustrates the deeply felt philosophical divisions that shaped the politics of Northern California.

While the two community groups appeared to be diametrically opposed, David Simpson attested to the benefits of their collaborative effort. Simpson elaborated, “I say that they learned from us, but we learned a lot from them too. They had a lot of information and history, a tremendous amount. They knew the history of the place from experience, growing up watching the river change” (personal interview, 2016). This place-based knowledge has been an asset to restoration work and provoked members of the restoration community to admit that they might have done a little more listening and a little less talking when things first started (personal interview, 2016). The two cultures may not have synergized harmoniously at the offset, but over time, the differences have become increasingly diluted and melded by history. While Mattole residents work to address community-wide issues in a way that draws from the collaborative roots of their restoration efforts, challenges and disputes persist. Yet this has not eroded the community. Melanie Mirthan-Nelson reflected,

I ask myself why it worked here when it hasn't worked in other places, and a lot of it is because of the difficulties of living here. You've got to get to know your neighbor; you've got to get along. You might not like that hippie-environmentalist-jerk, but he's better than the other jerks in town and he helped ditch the water bars. You know, when you are working the end of a shovel in a winter rainstorm, the philosophical principles have a tendency to get washed away (personal interview, 2016).

Working alongside one another has aided in this process; building knowledge through the first community-led restoration efforts in California, the Mattole Restoration Council evolved from humble beginnings in the early 1980s to become the largest

employer in the Valley. With rotating board members, the MRC works to bridge cultural gaps; however, they draw the line when it comes to including corporate representatives, in both timber and cannabis (Freedlund, personal interview, 2016). Working to protect community institutions has been a struggle and the expansion of restoration work into a restoration economy has challenged some of the early bioregional tenets. Integral to bioregional philosophy is a focus on incorporating local residents into restoration work as a way to foster social capital, develop ecosocial capital, and align jobs with the health of the environment. While many people have worked for various non-profits in the Valley, the nature of the organizations is changing. Longtime resident Ruth Rathbun spoke of the evolution of the restoration organizations while raising a child in the Mattole:

When Danny was young these organizations seemed really “us,” but now they are a little more free-standing. The MRC has its president and its board, and its sources of funding. It is not held up by a group of people who have taken it upon themselves to make it happen. It’s a blessing and a curse. I’m glad that they are doing their thing, but I don’t have to be involved. It somehow became more professional. It started with us doing this for our own salmon, then people came in with more funding. It became more professional. Both organizations [MRC and MSG] are solid and good for the community, though not representative of the community as they once were (personal interview, 2016).

While in the 1970s, pirate restoration dictated the terms of involvement, in today’s arena organizations across the nation struggle to meld their ideological foundations with the stipulations of the nonprofit industry. Another resident explained, “Work is determined by funding cycles and what grants are out there, rather than necessarily what people see in their backyards and see as important” (personal interview, 2016). Community participation is also impacted insofar as permitting and legal channels at times mandate the hiring of outsiders with advanced degrees or skill sets; grants may

stipulate specific qualifications for employment, necessitating external searches. These challenges are consistent with national trends in the nonprofit industry, which trickle down to the projects implemented at community levels.

The view from the local community illuminates its own set of challenges. The work of the restoration community tends to appeal to the same people repeatedly, failing to involve the diverse population in the Mattole. Within the restoration economy, there is a resounding discouragement, a frustration that local residents do not have the time nor the financial will to be involved. While restoration organizations may pay good money by the hour, there is more money to be made in cannabis agriculture. For instance, working a weekend job making \$25 per hour for the MRC might be a good amount of money, but if you can secure a job trimming cannabis buds for \$20 per hour and the job lasts the span of a few months, people are more inclined to follow the green. This affects the residents who continue to apply themselves to the bioregional efforts established by the new settler community. Running a wood chipper or a chainsaw for a weekend sometimes falls on the backs of the program managers, hindering the effectiveness of program implementation. After all, the basis of bioregionally minded work is predicated on the involvement of the community, not only creating new structures, but relationships where there were none.

When work is redirected to outside employees, tailored to funding cycles, and incompatible with the financial realities of the community, the bioregional image of the Mattole is threatened. The focus on nonprofit development accentuates the point that the Mattole does not exist in a bubble. The implications of the nonprofit industry are international, much like cannabis, timber, and economic considerations. Still, the hugely

successful projects and resilience of local restorationists' efforts are a testament to the community structures developed before such dependence on outside entities was the norm. While the trends of dominant society continue to permeate the Mattole Valley, it is important to understand the forces aiding the development of the new settler community, as well as those moderating its evolution.

### Bioregionalism as a form of life activism

The development of the restoration community introduces new jargon to the discussion. I am specific here in describing the bioregional focus of the community, as opposed to community activism. When I started this research, as noted in the opening sections, I was using the words “activist” and “activism.” I charged ahead wielding the words left and right, not realizing that in shaping my thesis around my perceived notion of activism, I was missing the bigger picture. While many new settlers see their lifestyle as pushing back, in my early interviews I was informed by older residents, as well as the children of new settlers, that these labels do not characterize life in the Mattole. While some agreed that there are no synonyms, “activist” tends to bring up negative connotations and very few self-ascribe to the term (Taylor, personal interview, 2016). One former resident suggested that the word has a way of undermining legitimacy. Some feel as though the media created the label of activist and that an activist is a specific archetype to which few can fully relate. While certain actions and involvements could be identified as activism, and could therefore earn someone the title of activist, reliance on the labels is not suited to the conversation.

As previously noted, historian Dona Brown (2011) described the back-to-the-land movement as a general consumer boycott. In the Mattole, the rejection of dominant society is visible through many resident's refusals to go back to the city where they grew up or the way they feel fully estranged from their former communities. Present in many of my interviews, residents explained they did not want anything to do with life in those external environments. Choosing to move to the Mattole, many people turned their backs literally and figuratively on dominant society. In their search for another way of life, a new lifestyle and belief system, some may be activists. However, activism, in most respondents' eyes, was about organizing and pamphleting – not a lifestyle.

Elements of activism do exist in the development of watershed restoration projects and engagement in forest defense work. One interviewee described growing up in the Mattole,

There was a while in the '80s and early '90s when being an activist was just getting people to recognize that it needed to happen, being willing to go and stand at a gate at five in the morning. It is hard to say if it is out of the box, it is the box that I know. Petition. Get on the radio. Reach out to the community. Direct action is an important part of activism (personal interview, 2016).

Bioregionalism is understood as a type of activism, a way for residents to influence their immediate surroundings and challenge existing systems. For some, homesteading itself was a direct action response (personal interview, 2016). Following this interpretation, every resident might be considered an activist; being motivated to do what needs to be done to protect a community is not something that was created in the Haight, nor is it something unique to this area. In the interviews, more often activism aligned with the words of Melanie Mirthan-Nelson (personal interview, 2016), as “a

function of living, not a thing that you do.” Part of the function of living necessitates the continuation of organizing, writing, performance, and involvement with issues that relate to the bioregion. In the realm of watershed restoration, residents who might not have participated in the hatchbox project still see the significance of maintaining a bioregional perspective. One resident clarified, “I haven't swum around counting fish, but the mindset and the awareness of that perspective is totally integrated in one way or another in most of us” (personal interview, 2016).

The perspective of change is expertly captured in the work of the Petrolia-based Human Nature Theater Company. Established in 1988 by David Simpson and Jane Lapiner, the theater company stands out as one of the unique ways of addressing environmental and social issues, not just in the Valley, but also around the world. As an evolution of the Digger Mime Troupe of San Francisco, the theater company fuses social commentary with hilarious musical comedy. They write on their Facebook page,

Our major direction since 1988 has been comedy and musical comedy that allows audiences to comprehend and accept perspectives that might otherwise [be] too painful or too radical to confront. We have found that broad, even-handed humor can be a great tool in dealing even with the most profound and serious of issues.<sup>24</sup>

The couple uses satire and humor to approach salmon restoration in their production “Queen Salmon”; wolf reintroduction in Yellowstone National Park, the focus of “Wolf at the Door”; and global environmental struggles in “What’s Funny About Climate Change?” After producing “Queen Salmon,” Simpson explained, “We were

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<sup>24</sup> Retrieved on April 4, 2017 from <https://www.facebook.com/Human-Nature-Theater-Company-340945562653882/>

creating this show about a community in conflict, between the logging and ranching elements and the newcomer environmental restorationists. It showed how a mutual love of salmon brought the community together” (as cited in Doran, 2003). Moving from local to international issues, Simpson and Lapiner write and choreograph their productions to demonstrate the humor inherent in socio-environmental conflicts and to bring people together to create change.

Petrolia is also home to *CounterPunch Magazine*, a political news source that challenges mainstream media in its bimonthly publications. Since 1993, the “muckraking” magazine has contributed articles addressing global economics, pharmaceutical testing, nukes, Russia, Trump, and a plethora of other topics. Now producing articles more regularly to online audiences, in addition to their six yearly magazine publications, *CounterPunch* links the political discussion building alongside the counterculture with today’s climate. The publication features articles from local residents, incorporating regional history, animal-habitat concerns, and most recently, David Simpson’s account from the United Nations 2016 Climate Summit in Paris. *CounterPunch Magazine* is not a reflection of a homogenous political perspective in the Valley; however, recognizing the magazine within the context of the Mattole complements the nuanced philosophical considerations of the residents.

The work of the Mattole new settlers demonstrates opportunity for blending and adapting strategies around local, national, and international issues. From the beginning, the Mattole has been connected to a network of social and political movements. One of the features I found most striking about the new settler community was the extensiveness



of these connections. From the counterculture and free speech movements to the anti-nuclear and multifarious political engagements of today, the connection to broader movements is a distinguishing component. Arriving in the Valley, many of the residents discovered a web of influence unified them. Mirthan-Nelson recounted,

I was kind of a younger member of a real loosely knit group of people that involved the Grateful Dead, the Family Dog Productions, the Hell's Angels, Bill Graham, and in a way I had "cred" when I came here. I discovered Jane and Dave [Jane Lapiner and David Simpson] had come out of that, the late '60s Haight and such. We knew a lot of names in common, kind of thing (personal interview, 2016).

Abbie Hoffman, Wavy Gravy, Hunter S. Thompson, the Black Panthers, the Weather Underground, Ken Kesey and the Merry Pranksters, Jerry Rubin, the Diggers – all prominent individuals and organizations from the Sixties era – created an “unorganized wave of organization” surrounding the Haight. These connections greatly influenced the waves of young people heading to the Bay Area or dispersing across the country in the back-to-the-land movement (Mirthan-Nelson, personal interview, 2016). While the development of the movements splintered into even more movements and transmuted in their own unique ways, bioregionalism can be traced from the conversations with Peter Berg in the city to the restoration projects that were implemented in Northern California. These efforts emerged in tandem with new settler reinhabitation and demonstrate the progression of bioregional advocacy. Thus, an understanding of the evolving Mattole new settler community is predicated on bridging these connections.

As a philosophy, bioregionalism has more pervasive implications when considered in its multifaceted form – as a political, socio-cultural, and economically imaginative movement. As noted in the chapter on bioregionalism, Peter Berg was further developing literature on bioregionalism while Diggers were integrating into Northern California communities. The Diggers and counterculture advocates not only shaped local politics, but also inspired conceptual shifts that would reverberate throughout the world. Focusing on the connection between organizers, intellectuals, and community members is important because it demonstrates a type of cohesiveness that extended beyond the counterculture formations of the 1960s. Bringing together the counterculture movement and the present creates a historical relevance for discussing concepts and evolution in bioregional thought and practice.

On a social level, bioregional focus helped heal the dissenting community, processing the trauma inflicted by the dominant culture against ideological opposition. The end of the 1960s era produced urban refugees, suffering the backlash against the counterculture and social-political movements. The backlash affected the development of their communities and continues to influence the way they engage broader structures and processes. Featured in the 2015 film *Requiem for the American Dream*, Noam Chomsky described the civil rights, freedom of speech, women's equality, and other movements of the 1960s as egalitarian efforts with civilizing effects on the American system. These movements for social rights caused tremendous fear among the establishment and resulted in a violent suppression of the populace, with government aggression targeting those who were categorized as “abnormal” or “fringe.” Chomsky (as cited in Nykes et al.,

2015) solemnly admitted, “I didn’t anticipate the power of the reaction to the civilizing effects of the '60s. I did not anticipate the strength of reaction to it – the backlash.”

Beginning in the 1970s, the backlash was orchestrated through a monstrous business offensive (Nykes et al., 2015). Pointing to the Powell Memorandum, in which corporate lawyer Lewis F. Powell, Jr., warned against the decline in the financial sector’s control and called for business to use its monopoly over resources to counter the democratizing wave, Chomsky demonstrated how manipulative language was used to rally enterprise and shape national policy (as cited in Nykes et al., 2015). Less than two months later, Lewis F. Powell, Jr., was nominated as an Associate Justice of the Supreme Court. In outlining the threat to business, Powell was careful to define the economic system in America as synonymous with the terms “free enterprise system,” “the profit system,” and “capitalism.” Conflating the system of law with the system of capital rule, those who challenged the legal system were directly threatening the economic machine. This produced an “us” and “them” dichotomy; Mattole resident Michael Evenson summarized,

“Us” was people who had their hair long, smoked pot, thumbed their nose at cultural conventions, didn’t want a materialistic life. “Them” were people who played by the rules and never questioned authority, didn’t make up their mind about how they wanted to live their own lives. They just inherited what they accepted. In the '60s, we questioned the whole thing. For us it seemed like where materialism was headed was the Vietnam War (personal interview, 2016).

The Sixties challenged the dominant system, serving as a wrench, a resistance, a vociferous call for cultural evolution; the backlash was concentrated in economic conservatism and an expansion of law enforcement. The implications of this aggression

reverberated across the country and dramatically shaped the Mattole new settlers, not only in the 1970s but to this day. Resident Ellen Taylor captured this sentiment in describing the motivation for community formation:

You know, the conceptions that people had to go through to keep out of the Vietnam War were traumatic. Not anywhere near as traumatic as the people who ended up doing the fighting, but still traumatic. There is a big scar over that whole generation for having to do those things [evade enlistment]. A big price to pay. I think a lot of people, that might have been a last straw – the repression of the anti-war demonstration. I went to some of the demonstrations in Washington that were extremely violent, police repression violence. There was an exhaustion. There's always been the theme that maybe you live by example, live simply, and maybe that would work better than all of this confrontation; that was the utopian theme (personal interview, 2016).

The pursuit of utopia inspired many settlers to establish themselves in the Valley, as people did across North America. This is important because it challenges the way the Sixties is referred to. Instead of being an isolated era of counterculture experimentation, it was one step in the evolution of politically and socially conscious action challenging dominant society. Through the involvement of the new settlers in these movements, the connection to the present is made visible.

Efforts to thwart the dominant paradigm did not stop with the decision to move to the Mattole Valley. Beyond the implementation of bioregionalism, many residents described their continuing involvement with national and international issues. A handful of residents discussed their participation at the World Trade Organization (WTO) protest in Seattle during 1999, a landmark time in resistance against global capitalism. The forces which generated the over-extraction of timber and violated the bioregional philosophy were challenged during these protests and echoed around the world. The new

settlers' baseline factor for living was sculpted by this history and is present in the minds and actions of the many residents today.

### Cannabis

“If you take care of the land, do right by the land, it takes care of you. We all live simply out here, it's only the latest with the green rush that aren't even trying to live simply” (Evenson, personal interview, 2016).

“Must we be forced to choose between waters, sweet runs, and reels, and all those lovely hundred dollar bills” (Simpson, personal interview, 2016).

#### The green economy

The challenges of standing up against capitalism and the philosophies of dominant culture are complicated in the realm of cannabis. While cannabis agriculture has contributed to economic, social, cultural, and environmental transformation, the entanglement of cannabis within the community structure has inhibited social action. One resident declared,

I'd like to say that I'm an activist, but when I think of the causes I would like to be in service to, I guess I'm not brave enough to stand up to my local culture. I'm not brave enough to stand up and say, “Hey, I don't like what you're doing here, neighbor.” I think it is easier to be an activist when your object is a timber corporation that has plans to clear-cut a hillside. Not that it is easy, but that is a party that is opposable. But in my mind, the need in the Mattole Valley is unlikely to occur, because it is asking really tough questions of our neighbors, my kid's friends. I think we need people standing up in the Mattole Valley that will take on the marijuana practices (personal interview, 2016).

Many residents despaired over the prospect of direct confrontation with neighbors regarding environmental issues; however, not long ago new settlers were vocalizing

concerns over logging practices, road development, and restoration, within the bounds of the community. At that time, the new settlers viewed the ranchers as more closely aligned with dominant society than the counterculture, but these two groups contributed to the broader Mattole Valley community. Subsequently, the views of a divided populace were challenged during CAMP years when they shared a common enemy, the Federal Government. The residents banded together around a rejection of the U.S. doctrine on drugs, federal law enforcement tactics, and social regulation. With CAMP and the assault by law enforcement, many residents reflected on a type of camaraderie that united the Valley:

It was hard to tell who is an outlaw and who is a peace-loving hippie and where the property line is when you're up in a helicopter. So it wasn't a targeted police action, it was a blanket assault on a lifestyle that was getting out of hand because it couldn't be taxed and it couldn't be monitored. The reason that lifestyle existed is because that fourth generation rancher had, as far as the government was concerned, pretty much the same or a more radical attitude than the hippie who bought the land from him. So it pulled the community towards a common self-identity. So CAMP was the best thing that ever happened; it chased the idiots out and brought the community closer together. You weren't cussing out your hippie neighbor when you were both too busy cussing the government (personal interview, 2016).

This quotation speaks of a time of cohesiveness, bringing residents together around an opposing force. While this alliance has shifted, commonalities still exist. The analysis of bioregionalism demonstrates the love of the land as a conjoining element in the face of incompatibility.

Applying this reasoning to cannabis agriculture, cannabis is not seen as evil; growing cannabis is not evil; in fact, cannabis can be grown and smoked the same way as when the new settlers arrived in the Valley. However, the industrialism of cannabis

agriculture and the increasing popularity of concentrated cannabis products are a contamination of the plant's history and the community's future; capitalistic industrialism has mutated the plant and the politics of growing. Furthermore, the materialism of the industry has changed the manner of smoking and consumption. Therefore, cannabis is not evil and those who grow cannabis and consume it are not evil; however, the industry of cannabis agriculture, when aligned with a capitalistic philosophy, does commodify, alienate, proliferate, and destroy. The line must be drawn within the realm of cannabis agriculture. The large commercial growers, those who exploit the land for monetary benefits, who reduce the plant to a commodity and the earth to an input, are aligned with the dominant culture. While these individuals may be community members and friends, they are in ideological opposition to the bioregionally minded residents. Thus, the similarities between the two Mattole chapters, timber and cannabis, demonstrate an evolution of the same conversation.

Reflecting on the development of the cannabis economy, one resident explained,

We always think that we are out here and we aren't part of this whole bigger thing that is gripping the nation or destroying the nation, but it is happening here too. It always amazed me. During the Reagan years, I remember thinking we are so lucky, no one is thinking about money, everybody is helping each other do everything...we are really going to be this pocket that the wave just washes over and then marijuana prices went way high and people made money and then all of a sudden they made more money than they could spend. That prosperity of the Reagan years ended up hitting Southern Humboldt and Petrolia (personal interview, 2016).

The affluence and economic realities of the cannabis market influenced the watershed region and permutated the bioregionalism versus capitalism debate, a conflict

that has intensified over the last decade in the Mattole. Melanie Mirthan-Nelson observed,

With a resource-based economy, community economies are driven by what is sustainable in a community and trying to need less and not get more. When a resource-based economy goes head-to-head against a revenue-based economy in our economic system, the resource-based economy is going to get steamrolled. The right of the individual that has been so heralded in this country over the last one hundred years is oxymoronic (personal interview, 2016).

Beyond the philosophical debate occurring in the historically dispossessed community, the implications of cannabis agriculture have continued to affect social relationships of the Valley. The legacy of law enforcement targeting community support systems as a policing mandate can be seen in the present. While new settler identity was initially created through confrontation with the state in urban settings, law enforcement policies to reestablish power dynamics over back-to-the-land communities have become a central component of identity formation.

During the years of CAMP there was outward hostility towards the government and the policies which targeted rural communities. As one former resident summarized, “It was not a violent place. It seemed like overkill. A lot of kids out there have issues with the police” (personal interview, 2016). The orchestrated attack by law enforcement inspired further resentment. Some puzzled, “You spent twenty years flying helicopters over our heads over *twenty* plants?” (personal interview, 2016). Those who were arrested described the emotional and professional challenges of having felonies for the cultivation of less than twenty plants. With mega-greenhouses and thousands of plants now covering hilltops, receiving a felony charge for sixteen plants seems preposterous; however, this



demonstrates the behemoth scale of cannabis proliferation and exemplifies the shifts in legality. In the wake of government policing strategies, one resident described the way CAMP demonized cannabis growers:

The official word from the government was that they were initializing a very select targeting police action to deal with a portion of the northern rural California population that were outlaws holding the area hostage. My parents would read this. When sinsemilla pot growing hit the front page of Life Magazine due to an individual, who will remain nameless...who decided to get famous without the foreknowledge...the 1980 Life Magazine spread...two pages were from our patches. It was an individual who was camped in his school bus at the top of Dan's property.<sup>25</sup> When that hit national, it was definitely being spun in almost the same way as the image of Mexican cartels, semi-automatic weapons, outlaws taking over the land. Everyone knew it wasn't that way. That misperception fueled a blow back reaction where that outlaw pot grower who bought that forty acres from you and has been not a half bad neighbor, was a better neighbor because he was being described as such a bad neighbor (personal interview, 2016).

The rallying point for the community coincided with a belief that "illegitimate laws should be violated as a matter of principle" (personal interview, 2016). The new settlers' view of law enforcement and the activities of cannabis aligned with their counterculture roots. Mary Siler Anderson (1990: 103) documented this culture war by presenting the following interview:

I also believed, and still believe, that CAMP wasn't really about marijuana. A high-ranking official said to me once, over the phone, "You people up there believe you have a God-given right to smoke marijuana and we're here to show you that you don't." To me, that indicated that the war on pot wasn't really about pot, it was about attitudes and lifestyle. When the original governmental furor over the use of marijuana and LSD was raging, it seemed to me that what was being objected to was the change in attitude the use of these drugs caused in us. We were no longer the good soldiers willing to go along with the national program. We were no longer willing to do and think what we were told to do and

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<sup>25</sup> Names have been changed to protect confidentiality.

think in order to further the national agenda. We had an agenda of our own and it threatened the orderly banality of society.

Initially, the polarization between the dominant and the counterculture was stark in contrast. As time went on, the mutations in the industry and the response by law enforcement blurred the community values and the lines of legality. While historically cannabis eradication efforts had a way of bringing diverse residents together, views regarding the cannabis economy and feelings toward law enforcement have changed. One resident commented on this shift in opinions as experienced while growing up in the Mattole,

The “we’re breaking the law because we think it is the right thing to do” attitude is gone...I don’t know if it is gone. I know a lot of people still feel self-righteous about what they are doing; that part is different. It used to be a community that was brought together by outside forces and outside pressures. Now it is a more fractured community. It’s not as simple as it used to be (personal interview, 2016).

Industrialization led to a mutation in the community makeup. Big money came to the Valley; this produced a glaring stratification of wealth, made evident by the presence of \$50,000 trucks, yearly vacations to Bali, and the juxtaposition of financial struggles and residents desperate to own property. The prevalence of greed and financial accumulation are elements the back-to-the-landers were not intending to cultivate in the Mattole; such factors have contributed to animosity and shifted the community closer to dominant society.

Coupled with financial distancing, physical divisions remind residents of philosophical fractures; the six-foot high fences are a glaring reminder of the individualism of the American West; the walls and annexation counter a communal

bioregionally focused vision. One resident lamented, “We move here because we love open space. To walk around my neighborhood and see these huge fences and walls, it is offensive” (personal interview, 2016). With increased traffic, walls, and secrecy, the residents yearn for better days, days when you could ride a horse from one ridge to the other without fear of running into a grower, prepared to defend their property from intruders.

Despite these examples of isolation, a love of the community is woven into each discussion; the relationships, the cultural traditions and practices, the annual races, cabarets, potlucks, and parties to help neighbors with projects or through hard times – these traditions unite community members, young and old. The residents hope that these types of activities will continue to influence the children of the Mattole and keep them from pursuing a life in the industry. Yet, the tension between two paths is real. One new settler responded, “They grow up with parents who have gas lamps, but they think we could make more money and not have to do that. Was it the displays of wealth that led to rebellion, or was it a natural progression?” The question posed is a challenge for all residents; the concern over the future has Mattolians worried about community dynamics. While many of the residents blame the changes to their own inabilities or failings, forces they could not control have morphed the industry.

#### Targeting the freedom of speech

These forces of control connect the social upheavals of the Sixties to the community today. For those who were participants in the counterculture, the objectives of law enforcement in San Francisco during the 1960s are consistent with the policies

against the residents of Northern California. Former Mateel resident and sociologist Jentri Anders contended, “I saw it as an extension of the Free Speech Movement” (personal interview, 2016). Anders’ statement contributed to a theme rippling through these interviews regarding free speech and the ways in which law enforcement discouraged resistance. Michael Evenson stated,

I wasn’t here at the beginning of CAMP, I felt it in Southern Humboldt. It was kind of an invasion, a cultural war. There were a series of Republican governors that really wanted us out of here; they were grandstanding in marijuana farms. The sad thing is that people had to be more private, it basically silenced their free speech rights in order to grow pot. And, some people had guns pointed at their heads – kids. Law enforcement always assumes that they are under attack and acts accordingly. It used to be that they were peace officers and at some point they became law enforcement officers in the late '60s. It was the wrong move because law enforcement is like terrorism and it doesn’t have to be. You can enforce laws without terrorism. No one was shooting at them, they weren’t in danger (personal interview, 2016).

Respondents continued to connect cannabis agriculture to the freedom of speech.

While policing efforts have not effectively silenced the community or inhibited many forms of social action, the perception of free speech being curtailed by cannabis agriculture emerged as an important theme. A Mattole resident aptly summarized the manner in which this occurred:

One of my wife’s theories is that the government has tricked the hippies, the activists, the pot growers into being complacent by letting them grow pot. If the government lets it be nominally legal, but not fully legal, it puts a whole bunch of people who would normally be activists into a position of keeping their heads down. They are being allowed to do their thing, but it's not fully one hundred percent legal, so they don’t want to step up and open their mouths about things. It is true to a certain extent. If marijuana cultivation was one hundred percent legal, people would be more willing to step up and yell about things. When it was one hundred percent *illegal* people were also more inclined to yell about things (personal interview, 2016).

This view of free speech demonstrates the continuation of government suppression, connecting to Foucault's analysis of the carceral. While the residents may not be experiencing the war zone that characterized the CAMP years, the idea that speech may be stifled by the ambiguity of cannabis regulation demonstrates the lasting effects of law enforcement on the community. The conversations regarding PTSD among the youth and the concern over Humboldt County Water Board and DFW agents entering rural communities maintain the narrative of government aggression. Furthermore, the erosion of rights continues to affect growers who are subject to asset seizure, both of property and finances, illegal profiling, search, arrest, and in preventing them from using their financial resources for legal representation. While the residents are insulated from police presence in their own community, sans even a local deputy sheriff, the drug war continues to replicate the same tactics of intimidation and control.

While restoration efforts, climate change advocacy, and forest defense work persist, the fear of standing out and speaking up, when internalized by a portion of the community, inhibits cohesion. Fear opposes community building and advocacy work. Those who have a history of challenging government policies and institutions have seen cannabis possession, cultivation, and distribution wielded against community organizers and advocates. Despite the recent legalization of recreational cannabis in California, ambiguous laws and uncertainty about the future maintains a veil of secrecy within the industry and has discouraged more than just open dialogue about water use, growing practices, and who is actually growing.

### Implications on the landscape

Despite the hostile relationship with law enforcement, policing environmental degradation has been embraced, if somewhat reluctantly, by residents. Self-regulation, a platform of the Mattole Valley residents, has been ineffective in the realm of industrial cannabis agriculture. Michael Evenson summarized, “So, really there is no enforcement. You get to be a certain size or certain wealth and it gets to be hard, we are failing at that one. So people with their water problems, don’t want to go to the water board or government agencies, so then might makes right” (personal interview, 2016). This mirrors the language of Charles Hurwitz during the takeover of Pacific Lumber Company. Hurwitz described government by the gold rule, “He who makes the gold rules” (cited in François, 2007: 234). The idea that one can seize with impunity as much as they can from a place completely negates the bioregional perspective of working within the limitations of a natural system. The new settlers now tolerate the involvement of law enforcement in their community in hopes that the environmental effects will be curtailed.

In the last few years, Sanctuary Forest, a restoration-focused nonprofit based in Whitethorn, California, has worked with the Mattole community to increase the use of water tanks as part of their Storage and Forbearance Program. The program provides landowners with water storage tanks for collecting the water they will need, so they can forgo pumping water from the river and creeks during the dry season when the land needs

it most.<sup>26</sup> Sanctuary Forest encourages residents to reflect their values to their neighbors; those who sign on to the program receive a decorative metal salmon, painted blue and secured at the end of their driveway to demonstrate their participation in the watershed initiative. In this way, neighbors begin to see what standards their neighbors are setting for watershed stewardship. This water storage program eases the pressure on watersheds that have been devastated by the waves of industrialism.

Despite these new programs for community-led environmental standards, many people's fears still fuel the formation of factions within the industry; the debate over cartels, Bulgarian mobsters, and other outside invaders perpetuates the divisive language used during the CAMP days. Marisa Formosa, former Education & Development Coordinator with Sanctuary Forest and granddaughter of Bob McKee, spoke of her work on restoration initiatives, "I had to call hundreds of land owners. I talked to a couple of Bulgarians. As far as I can tell, they are doing the same thing as everyone else. Everyone is on their own property and speculating" (personal interview, 2016). This characterization of cartels and condemnation of others' environmental offenses promotes separation within the watershed and reduces personal culpability for environmental destruction.

The reframing of law enforcement around environmental regulations has been supported by the residents who are witnessing the extractive industry violate the watershed. One resident clarified,

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<sup>26</sup> Sanctuary Forest. *Storage and Forbearance Program*. Retrieved April 16, 2017, from <http://www.sanctuaryforest.org/programs/water-stewardship/tanks-forbearance-program/>

Personally I wouldn't mind a few big busts of a few big scenes. I don't want to see my neighbor with the six plants who grows out in the sunshine get busted, but it would be okay to see a little more enforcement ... A lot of people like to blame the Bulgarians, but I think maybe it is just easier to do that. There are people my age who grew up here who are doing large scale and unsustainable scenes, 'cause on the one hand, this kid grew up here and you know him and love him and want to make a special case for him. The thing about greed is that it appeals to people from different backgrounds. And, I just don't really know who is growing the worst. My sincere fear is that restoration work is becoming irrelevant and it is becoming irrelevant because of the marijuana industry (personal interview, 2016).

In the absence of local standards for cannabis agriculture, Humboldt County has set regulations for compliance, enforced by the Water Board and the DFW. While this provides a benchmark for environmental management, many growers are wary of the visibility compliance entails. Encouraging growers to come out of the shadows has been a difficult transition and as mentioned in the background chapters, the emergence of citizen groups has not occurred without busts and backlash. Mattole grower Jessi Bergsma Rockenbach worked as a CCVH organizer to share information about the compliance process and compel neighbors to meet the standards set, but not without awareness of what is at stake. Rockenbach wrote on the community's Google group page,

I pass no judgement on people who are choosing not to deal with the unknowns of the white market. It's a scary change for many, with years of unpredictable regulations still to come. The people who are coming into full County Ordinance Compliance are those who want to take a shot at making a lifelong career for themselves. We are facing many unknowns, but we're excited for the opportunity and the pathway forward, despite being kept awake at night with worry. It's a difficult transition at times. The fear is real, but then again, it always has been. It's just a different flavor now.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Bergsma Rockenbach, J. (2016, May 3). *Water Board Update*. Mattole Valley Bulletin. <https://groups.google.com/forum/#!topic/mattole/g1LGA9l-vms>.



The uncertainty of this time places increased pressure on the landscape. With more growers flocking to the Mattole, eager to buy in to the cannabis economy, land has become a coveted feature of the Valley. For the new settlers, many of whom moved to the Mattole by way of handshake deals and government welfare, the spike in land prices has raised the entry threshold for friends and family to buy property in the Valley. Real estate and bank developers are now interested in the watershed; the Douglas-fir forests are recovering, the ocean views are stunning, the ecologically based traditions of the residents have developed into community institutions, and cannabis agriculture is an ingrained feature of region. Now retirees and major growers are the new wave of settlers. Michael Evenson reflected, “T.K. Clark said about the hippies, ‘Now we know what the Indians felt when our grandparents came.’ And, now we can say we know how the ranchers felt when we came, with the green rush” (personal interview, 2016). The dismay at the green rush, the shift in economics, the effects on the landscape, and the subsequent spike in property costs have created a somber situation. Another resident stated,

I’ve been disappointed lately in the crappy marijuana green rush. And people have always done this, but people are now selling their land at really inflated prices to really big dope growers. And, people say that we would do it too and I would say no, I actually just sold property last month for way less than we could get because that’s not what I wanted. I didn’t want a big grower (personal interview, 2016).

Other residents struggle with the inflated land prices. Danny Rathbun confirmed,

The price of land here is extreme. It is very difficult for anyone but a marijuana farmer or a retiree to buy land. The back-to-the-land dream is feeling less and less realistic (personal interview, 2016).

The land prices make it hard for people to invest in the community; the desire to own land was discussed openly at community gatherings and reaffirmed in many of the interviews. Economic forces – the climbing property values now competing with the attraction of restoration employment and the ecology-minded purposes of restoration work – have tainted the reinhabitation vision that allowed committed people to listen to their hearts and be guided by the spirit of the Mattole into the community. One resident shared,

It's really hard when people cut and leave and just try to get what they can. People getting what they can from the Valley and then getting out. Our native plant nursery property is for sale. People decided they could move because they could list their property for 900,000 dollars.<sup>28</sup> What does that mean for the MRC that just developed that? These are good people; they are family. I can't hold it against them forever, 'cause that's what other people are doing. It is hard to see people sell out. On the other side, they are probably thinking that everyone else is selling out by turning to marijuana (personal interview, 2016).

This struggle to create restoration solutions is thwarted by a monolith of an industry and has some residents looking for a way out. However, others see this as a wave in history; they will maintain their commitment to never move and instead wait out the green rush. Melanie Mirthan-Nelson spoke of this development and the future of the community:

Unfortunately, there is money to be made in real estate and in pot and that is going to be the death of the kind of community that we have built here over the last fifty years and that saddens me very much. Other common denominators for living here - when you look at life and you're determining what you should do. Either you look at doing more to earn more to be able to obtain more, or working to need less. Unfortunately, the need less attitude does not drive the economic

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<sup>28</sup> Another resident countered that the piece of property being discussed sold for \$400,000 in 2016. Regardless of the most current sale price for the property in question, I chose to include this quote because I believe that it demonstrates the dissatisfaction with changes in property ownership, the climbing prices, and the influence of cannabis agriculture on the community's social dynamics.

engine where a few folks think they own everything. What has enabled and empowered the Mattole community over the last fifty years has not been opportunity, it has been lack of opportunity (personal interview, 2016).

For those who are disheartened by the inaccessibility of property ownership, the compounded destruction of the landscape is difficult to accept. The bulldozing of hillsides, the fertilizers, pesticides, and toxins entering the ecosystem, and the practice of watering dry gardens during the hottest time of the year, all in the name of cannabis, is averse to the health of the watershed (Evenson, personal interview, 2016). Other residents wonder about the constant hum of generators and fans, the lights, and greatly increased traffic disrupting the wildlife. While the ecological impacts are difficult to quantify, these effects are part of industrialized cannabis agriculture. This is not to say that everyone is growing cannabis without consideration of the broader watershed; one resident acknowledged,

I know that there are sustainable growers out here. I know many of them. They grow marijuana and they do it in mostly sustainable ways. Doing it responsibly. Those people are...bless them; truly, bless them (personal interview, 2016).

While destructive consequences may not be inherent in cannabis agriculture, there is a resounding belief that the Valley cannot support the industrialized practices of any commodity. As for the future of the community, a resident summarized,

It is my hope and on optimistic days I have faith that this is just a blip in time and that the values of loving the land and loving the river and loving the animals we share our home with are going to outlast and outgun the values of greed that are distracting people from being part of their landscape and their watershed, but on pessimistic days I worry about it (personal interview, 2016).

Just as the residents came into an area where major timber extraction had reshaped the Valley, now cannabis threatens the same ends. Consequently, these

residents, who were skeptical of the government and the regulations on their lifestyle, now turn to the government to aid them in the protection of the watershed. For the community, the environment has always been the focus – from salmon, to forests, to cannabis.

These beliefs extend from the local to the global, encompassing a climate change awareness. The Mattole community members, while believing they will be insulated in Northern California from many climate change effects, still observe the changes in the land. Mirthan-Nelson concluded, “We could have been better. We could be better at giving our children that same perspective for balance that we have found so empowering, but some have” (personal interview, 2016). On some days, the vibrancy of the community and the diversity of faces coming to the region to participate in the cannabis economy make the Mattole a remarkable rural community; but on others, the community must consider the realities of the global capitalist system and its presence in the Valley.

#### The inextricable connection between the earth and the body

In alignment with any extractive industry, the body of the earth is being transformed. While cannabis agriculture may not have the same look as gold mining, oil extraction, or timber harvesting, the diversion of resources, the grading of landscapes, and the use of pesticides, rodenticides, and other toxins are ravaging the bioregion. Connecting the aforementioned discussion of western expansion to the stories of the Mattole residents demonstrates that the greed and exploitation that entered the Valley with Manifest Destiny lives on in the ambitions of growers attracted to the financial possibilities of industrial cannabis production. The colonial mentality perpetuates the

degradation of community, nation-wide compassion, and care for not only nonhuman life, but for humanity itself.

The destructive realities of capitalism are not new to the Mattole; extractive industries have long shaped the environmental conditions of the Valley, but the parallel assault on the human body is typically omitted from discussion. This is not unique to the Mattole, but demonstrative of national consciousness – however, an awareness entwined through counterculture reconnection is resurfacing in social movements against extractive industries today. For instance, the Indigenous-led movement in North Dakota against Dakota Access Pipeline emphasized the connection between the human body and the earth, specifically the female body and the treatment of land and water. In Northern California, Wiyot people use ceremony to heal the earth, incorporating renewal, reciprocity, and community capacity building with “the power to overthrow and break contemporary peoples free from colonial racism, heteropatriarchy, misogyny, and rampant gender violence that are ubiquitous within militarized regions and that of resource extractive industries” (Oros, 2016: 67). In contrast to the legacy of extraction, these practices emphasize the binding of human and nonhuman dynamics.

The inextricable link between extractive industries and the body is visible in the sexual and gendered dynamics of the cannabis industry. In writings ranging from the research work of sociologist Karen August (2012) to the botanical flourishing of author Michael Pollan (2001), sex is entangled in cannabis cultivation. Starting with the plant, only female plants produce the buds that are trimmed and prepared for consumption. The male plants are culled from every garden to prevent sexual processes (resulting in seed

production) between the plants, which will compromise an entire crop. Since male plants are counterproductive to cannabis gardens, “cloning” or taking cuttings from an established female “mother” plant allows male plant growth to be avoided (Pollan, 2001: 135). Young sprouts are typically referred to as “babies” and once planted, referred to as “girls.” The manipulation of plant maturity, forcing the plants to show sex characteristics by depriving them of light, speeds up the growth process and allows farmers to produce larger, more developed plants, in shorter periods of time. The entirety of cannabis agriculture is contingent on sex.

Extending plant biology to social relationships, Karen August (2012) investigates the gender division in labor, business, and social roles. Inherent in this research is the focus on the sexual objectification of women within the cannabis industry. The male dominated industry places men in farmer and dealer roles, with women in lesser roles, commonly as trimmers or as girlfriends of growers. Throughout Humboldt County the term “grow-ho,” typically assigned to women, has been used to describe a trimmer who engages in sexual relationships with a grower. This strikes close to the Mattole community where a very visible sexual assault case in 2016 exposed the horrific realities of sexual exploitation linked to the cannabis economy. While I was conducting my research for this project, The Center for Investigative Reporting published the story of Kailan Meserve and the sexual assault of a “trimmigrant,” an employee hired during the trim season. This was the first time that a Humboldt grower has been charged with rape, but as documented by the article and through August’s research, sexual objectification and assault are attached to the cannabis industry today.

While this case has shaken the community and produced a deep sadness, the conclusion that the utopian dream is a quixotic pursuit and not a fully formed reality is perhaps the more challenging part. The exploitive nature of the cannabis industry continues the same violence against the land and the people that shaped the region during settler contact, the gold rush, and commercial logging. Like a disease, the pervasiveness of the capitalist philosophy has infected environmental and social relationships; inseparable from extractive industries, the philosophy of domination and exploitation of the land must evolve. As sympathetic newcomers continue to arrive in response to the world-renowned natural beauty of the Valley or to work for the Mattole Restoration Council, hope is renewed. The spiritual aspects of the place, so strongly felt by its first conscious reinhabitants, comfort the disoriented and the downtrodden. Looking to the future, Michael Evenson suggested, “I think that there is a number of people who can really hear the land and the landscape. And it is calling to us and if you hear it, you really cannot transgress” (personal interview, 2016).

## INTERLUDE: BIOREGIONALISM IN POETRY

*The Gift*

*to catch life's butterfly  
 in midflight-delight grasping no more  
 seeing cliff caves as animal homes  
 of gray fox, hawk & lizard  
 letting the empires  
 of mud, money & steel  
 live out their intermingling webs  
 spun across greed's barren desert*

*the idea has been born in us  
 But it needs YOU  
 keeper of the cages  
 butterflies & moths  
 both enticing beyond poems  
 which way do you spin...  
 man  
 which fork is your tongue  
 do you speak Human*

*gyroscopes are free  
 walk thin lines  
 through four dimensions  
 & always balanced  
 like water                    the gift.*

Powell (1978)



## CONCLUSION

“Culture is written in its stories. The more you provoke people to tell stories, the more you will get a picture” (Evenson, personal interview, 2016).

Listening to the stories of the Mattole has provided an entry point for cultural understanding, not isolated to the Valley but applicable to global contexts. Through these chapters, I have explored the back-to-the-land literature, the Sixties era social movements, the bioregional philosophy that inspired and shaped the new settlers’ establishment in the Mattole Valley, and the evolution of this social, political, and economic model. Based on the experiences of the residents, bioregionalism is in direct contention with capitalism; following the history of cannabis agriculture highlights this philosophical struggle. The stories of the Mattole residents reveal the dance between these two philosophies and offer guidance as we perambulate into the unknown.

Throughout much of this thesis, I end up speaking of the dominant culture and the counterculture. However, the assumed dichotomy begs a question I know is implicit in this research: Did the counterculture win or fail? Peter Coyote (2009), author, actor, and founding member of the Diggers during the counterculture formation, unpacks this query during a presentation in San Francisco:

First of all, I think that the idea of a counterculture itself is a problem, the idea that you're going to invent a culture to stand outside the majority culture and you're going to make a world that's so appealing and so inviting and so wonderful that when this one collapses everyone is going to run over...not going to happen. Lots of people out there that didn't want their kids to be around drugs, around long-haired sexually libertine experimental crazy people...and we missed the opportunity to organize those people by being so attached to our own freedom.

So, looking at it in hindsight, counterculture condemns you to marginality, to being marginalized.

So, I don't think the failure of the counterculture is a problem. I actually think it's a blessing, because what it means is that we're all now in the same culture together and you can't tell who's who, you can't tell who's a change agent. So every single place that anyone of us touches the culture is a juncture point at which we can press for change. If you study martial arts you know that to change an adversary's direction you have to contact him, but at the point of contact the fall goes to the most conscious, not the biggest. So where we work, how we work, where we shop, how we shop, what we use, what we waste, what we don't, all of those are actions of change agency and we can do that as a secret practice; no one knows we're doing it.

So, I don't think that the counterculture failed. I think we failed in all of our political agendas; we didn't end war, we didn't end racism, we didn't end imperialism, we didn't end capitalism, we didn't do a whole bunch of things. But on a cultural level, we won everything. So, there's no place in the United States today where you can't go and find organic food, alternative spiritual practices, a women's movement, environmental groups, alternative medical practices. I mean, everybody's seen a homeopathist, an acupuncturist, a healer, yoga practitioner, something like that. It's completely woven into the culture, the slow food movement, restaurants like Chez Panisse and their ripple effect through the farms and through the restaurants in this area. All that has been a highly, kind of invisible effect and it endorses the Digger's first intuition that culture was a more powerful and enduring force than politics.

When you ask: "Can it happen today?" I think it is happening. All of our kids, my daughter's a Ph.D. psychologist; all of her friends are young nurses and OBGYNs and doulas and people in the healing professions...all of those people are out there and they're just doing their work practicing compassion, taking care of the world, taking care of other people, invisibly. And, my daughter wears high heels and lipstick and will dance all night long, you know, and loves being a girly-girly, but she'll grab a wrench, she'll fix a truck, she'll do whatever. And, they just internalized those values that their parents had to stumble clumsily through, the beginnings of feminism and the first grappling of men with feminine instincts and principles. They've just taken to it on like kids today with cell phones and computers; they just play with it, effortlessly. So, I actually think it's evolved and evolved and evolved and still changing.

And, I'm actually in that regard optimistic that we, meaning our generation, managed to plant fundamental ideas about family, about tribe, about compassion, about looking and taking care of other people, and it's just we can't see it because it doesn't have edges; it's like the self. It doesn't have a definite shape it, doesn't have a definite location, it doesn't have a definite form. So, is it real or isn't it real? We have the experience of having a self even though we can't

touch it, so I have this experience of this force that's dissipated through the entire culture – which feels pretty good.

Situating Peter Coyote's words in the current context, the culture war is upon us.

The divisiveness and destructiveness of our national agenda (highlighted by the 2016 presidential election) seeks to sever the very elements that illustrate community. In seeing the evolution of social movements and advocacy, the collision of these contrasting ideological approaches will define culture in the next century, as they have woven themselves through the history of the landscape and the creation of the Mattole Valley community. The residents I spoke with emphasize the plethora of ideologies that make the Valley a special place to live. The camaraderie from earlier decades has not been forfeited. Working alongside each other is the backbone of the Mattole, its source of resilience. Connecting these diverging forces creates opportunity for synthesis and growth.

Despite the philosophical differences, the cultural challenges, and an awkward melding of diametrically opposed beliefs, there persists one commonality, a deep-seated commitment and love for the Mattole (personal interview, 2016). Michael Evenson added, "T.K. talks about 'Mattole against the world' as a battle cry in a bar. There is a certain kind of isolation here that promotes us to stay together or the world will have its way here" (personal interview, 2016). The community has seen this, has resisted external domination, and has been summoned to transform with each wave of influence. The new settlers reiterated the acknowledgement of the community as a place with lessons for the

rest of society, initially proposed by Jentri Anders in the late 1980s. Melanie Mirthan-Nelson (personal interview, 2016) stated,

I think this community holds a blueprint, demonstrates a blueprint that we are going to desperately need when the bridges fall...and the bridges are going to fall. It is communities like ours and understanding why communities like ours have continued to exist that is going to be very important when you have individuals stumbling along in the wreckage going, “How are we going to survive?”

As we enter a new era of political engagement, mirroring the culture wars of the 1960s, residents contend that collectivity rather than individualism will guide not only the Mattole, but also our nation into the future. Throughout Northern California, researchers who engage the narratives of the counterculture communities paint a similar picture (Anders, 1990; McCubbery, 2007; Raphael, 1985). In alignment with these conclusions, we see challenges to this future vision: the tension between short term over long-term investment, extractive industries and mindsets, philosophical estrangement from community and place. Yet still, we see the fusion of countering beliefs. Even before the presidential election of 2016, one resident astutely inferred,

The dominant culture does not allow living outside the box. We don't have the same general goals or valuation – how we value ourselves, our labor, and the land, those three things from which everything is defined. Dominant culture, even in a way more so amongst the liberal progressive culture really, has very little tolerance for mindsets and value systems that don't in some manner reflect the dominant. That's probably the single main different between the dominant and our culture here (personal interview, 2016).

Implicating cannabis agriculture in the extension of industrial cannabis, it is true that cannabis is a threat to restoration; however, it is the philosophy underneath industrialism which will ultimately dictate the earth's future. Cannabis is the

contemporary space of contestation, but the story of cannabis has been told in Northern California over the generations with different actors.

As for bioregionalism, the philosophy persists in a multitude of forms today. In fields related to ecological stability, the advocacies of restoration workers and urban ecological movements, permaculture and organic farmers, teachers, artists, poets, painters, theater groups, and communities, each exploring, incorporating, and celebrating the potential of bioregionalism, we see this philosophy emboldened. The connection between Deep Ecology, Social Ecology, and diverse academic movements embracing the necessity for education and awareness surrounding bioregional tenets elevates this belief. Even my own academic pursuits in an interdisciplinary area of study support bioregional elements as a way to guide and inform a new wave of intellectuals and teachers. Quite simply, the substitution of regional identifiers, such as the “Pacific Northwest,” draws from a bioregional understanding and aligns with projects for bioregional connectivity. All around us, we see evidence of this movement and re-engagement with our respective biospheres.

In the bioregion where I make my home, the sun is out after a seemingly endless deluge. I stretch my toes out in the grass and listen to chirps, buzzing, hums, and waves of wind, a cacophony of sound in the wilderness of Northern California. I hear a wind-chime and a car, reminders that I share this world with not only insects, plants, birds, and mammals, but people too. This place is our home; the land we share with all things. Moreover, it shares with us.

It is through these moments that my mind drifts to the Mattole. I am recognizing the Valley not just as a place for watershed restoration and retired isolation. The Mattole is a community and with the community comes the involvement between people and the earth, fish species, trees, and cannabis plants, and a vigorous attempt to live in a way that allows for creating new ideals and values. Is this something that has been achieved? Well, the story is more complex than that. What can be said is that the battles over culture, trees, and cannabis have profoundly influenced this region, contributing to the present Mattole identity and channeling its energy. The reason for this work is that the legacy of the new settlers and bioregional philosophy lives on; in choosing the Mattole Valley as a space for social experimentation and as a countercultural settlement, the community is a reflection of the themes facing the world at large.

When I began this research, profound contributors to the Mattole community traveled to Paris for the United Nations Climate Change Conference, their sixth world summit meeting. Amidst enthusiasm, excitement, and intense protest, they maintained an unwavering determination to save the earth. Despite their dedication to these meetings, David Simpson and Jane Lapiner are very aware that the solution will not come from an international meeting. Their transition from active participants in the counterculture movement of San Francisco to their establishment in the Valley as restorationists, bioregionalists, theater performers, and community members has taught them lessons about this world. In listening to the Mattole, in opening themselves up to the human and nonhuman connections, the couple forges ahead. Despite extraction and industrialism espousing the capitalist mantra of the dominant class and waging physical and

psychological assault on the dissenters, there is resilience and a rejuvenated spirit. With every crusade and collision of culture, the land offers equilibrium and teaches stability to a disoriented society. This is why, like the salmon, they return to the Mattole.

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APPENDIX A: CERAMIC SCULPTURE OF RESEARCH MADE BY AUTHOR







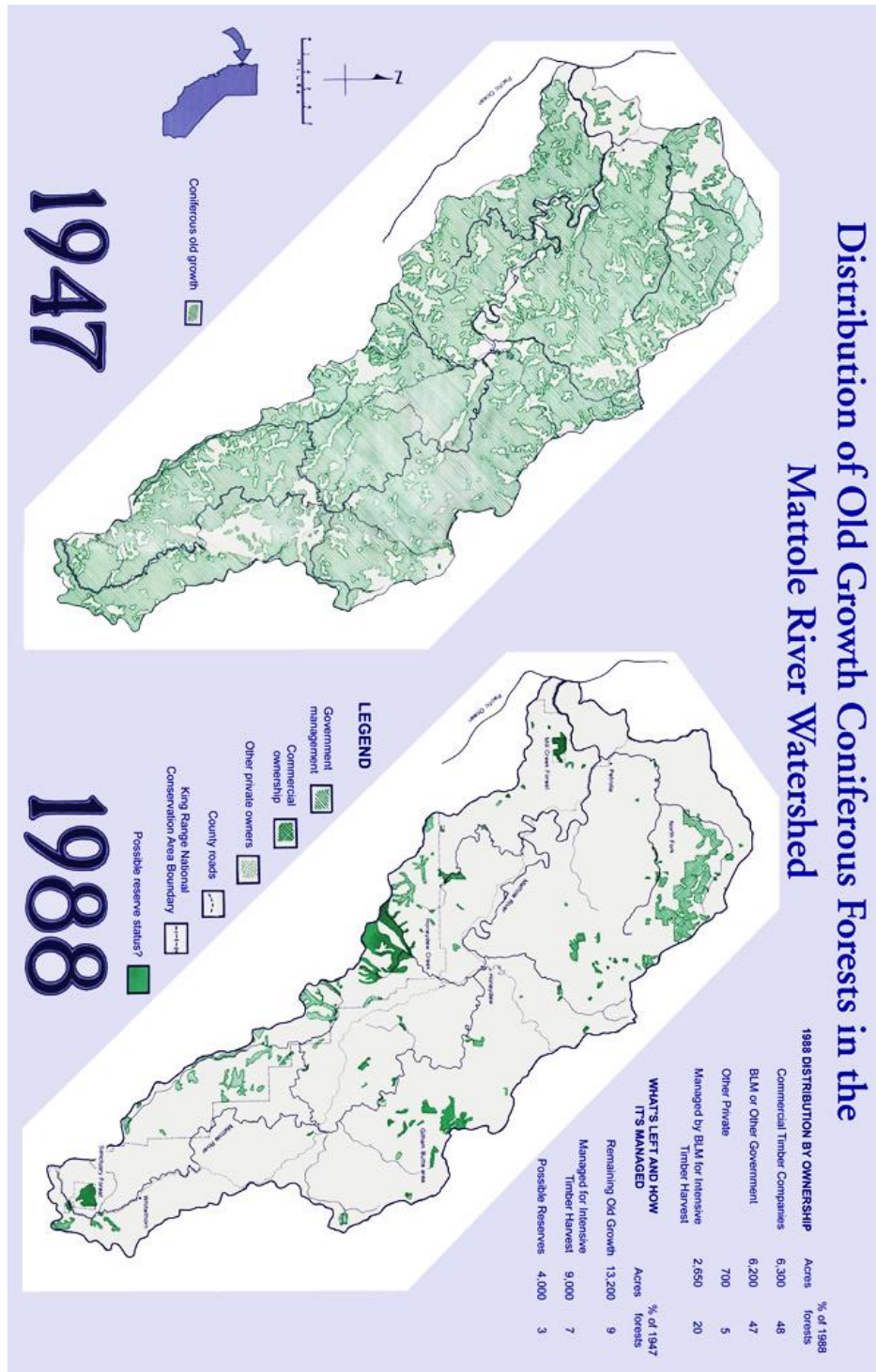


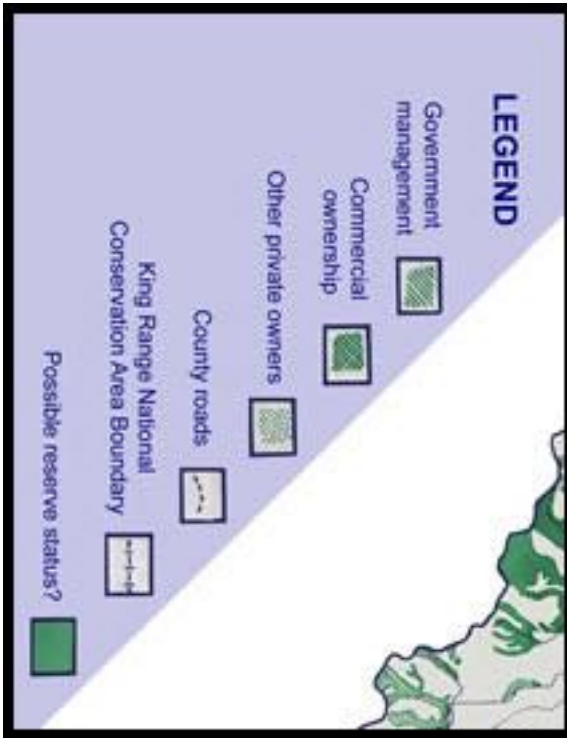


APPENDIX B: MAP OF THE MATTOLE WATERSHED



APPENDIX C: MAP OF REDUCTION IN CONIFEROUS FORESTS





1988 DISTRIBUTION BY OWNERSHIP		Acres	% of 1988 forests
Commercial Timber Companies		6,300	48
BLM or Other Government		6,200	47
Other Private		700	5
Managed by BLM for Intensive Timber Harvest		2,650	20

WHAT'S LEFT AND HOW IT'S MANAGED		Acres	% of 1947 forests
Remaining Old Growth		13,200	9
Managed for Intensive Timber Harvest		9,000	7
Possible Reserves		4,000	3



APPENDIX D: MAP OF THE EMERALD TRIANGLE



APPENDIX E: PICTURES OF THE MATTOLE VALLEY











## APPENDIX F: CONSENT FORM

**Back to the Land: The Evolution of Activism in the Mattole Valley, California**

**Primary Researcher:** Nicola Walters

**Project Title:** Back to the Land: The Evolution of Activism in the Mattole Valley, California

**Purpose of the Project:**

The purpose of the project is to document the history of the Mattole Valley and the people living there. The research is focused on the oral histories of the new settler population that moved to the Mattole Valley through the 1970s. The project is geared towards understanding the evolution of activism work as experienced by Mattole residents through incorporating the narratives of this initial migration to the present experiences of the community.

**Project Structure:** If you decide to take part in this study, I will conduct an in-person interview with you. Interviews will be administered one-on-one and will solicit information about your personal connection to the Mattole Valley.

**Benefits and Risks of the Study:** As a participant, there will be no direct benefit to you for taking part in this study. However, your input will be a part of a collective history of the Mattole Valley, shed light on the influences of diverse viewpoints and ideals, and provide insight on the subsequent changes that the community has faced. It is my hope that this type of project can serve as a resource for the community. I do not anticipate any risks to you participating in this study.

**Compensation:** You will receive no compensation for participating in this discussion.

**Confidentiality and Use of Information:**

Due to the personal nature of this research, Nicola Walters will take every measure possible to protect the confidentiality of information provided by residents during and after the interview process. These measures include:

- Explicit consent will be obtained from all participants
- All information on the individual level will remain confidential. Only Nicola Walters will handle the data collected during the interviews using password protected computers and locked filing cabinets
- Analyses and results will only be published or presented in an aggregate form. No names or identifying information will be used in the publication of the results, unless consented to. Analyses and results will be printed in a graduate student thesis through Humboldt State University. Results may also be written up in peer-reviewed journals.

**Taking part in this interview is voluntary.** You may skip any questions that you do not want to answer. If you decide to take part, you are free to withdraw at any time.

If you have questions regarding your rights as a participant, you may contact Institutional Official at Humboldt State University, Ethan Gahtan, at [REDACTED].

Researcher Name and Contact info:

Nicola Walters  
[REDACTED]

Supervising Faculty Member Name and Contact info:

Noah Zerbe  
[REDACTED]

**Statement of Consent:** I understand that the researcher will answer any questions I may have concerning the project or the procedures at any time. I also understand that my participation in any study is entirely voluntary and that I may decline to enter this study or may withdraw from it at any time. I have read the above information, and have received answers to any questions I asked. I consent to take part in the study.

Your Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Your Name (printed) \_\_\_\_\_

In addition to agreeing to participate, I also consent to having the interview tape-recorded.

Your Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Direct quotes:** (To be used as researcher deems necessary)

Please write your initials next to the statement that reflects your wishes.

\_\_\_ I may be quoted directly and cited by name.

\_\_\_ I may be quoted directly, but **not** cited by name. (Cited as; “resident”, “rancher”, etc.)

\_\_\_ I may be quoted directly, but **not** cited in any way.

\_\_\_ I do **not** wish to be quoted directly, nor have my name cited.

The researcher will keep this consent form for the duration of the IRB approval.