

PBS: View from the Understory

Contributed by Richard Rowe
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KVIE PBS ViewFinder Up From the UnderStory

Experience the inspiring story of how residents of the struggling Calaveras County foothill community of Blue Mountain partnered with students, Native Americans, and UC Davis experts to revitalize their economy protect the environment, and regain pride in their hometown and heritage. Watch the full episode (26:46) See more ViewFinder.

Calaveras communities subject of PBS documentaryBy Dana M. Nichols

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WEST POINT - Residents of the Blue Mountain towns of West Point, Wilseyville, Glencoe and Rail Road Flat will be featured in a documentary airing Wednesday on Sacramento's KVIE Channel 6.

"Up from the UnderStory" tells how Blue Mountain residents have worked over the last decade to combat social, environmental and economic ills. The 30-minute documentary was filmed in late 2009 by a team of University of California, Davis, scholars and artists in cooperation with Blue Mountain residents.

UC Davis media artist jesikah maria ross said the idea was to tell a story using "rural voices, which is not what you usually get on PBS."

The Blue Mountain Region has suffered as much or more than any part of Calaveras County from cycles of economic boom and bust. Mining built the towns and, later, timber mills were major employers.

The last mills closed more than 40 years ago. For decades, the community has had chronic poverty. At the same time, many forests have become overgrown and prone to catastrophic wildfires.

Since the mid-1990s, various groups have launched a successful community center for youth and families, a job training program that put some people back to work thinning local forests, and efforts to restore the vibrance of local American Indian culture and to plan for a public park system, something the area now lacks.

What inspired ross was seeing the way that groups normally at odds - loggers and environmentalists, old ranch families and newcomers with big-city backgrounds - had learned to cooperate to find solutions.

In addition to the video documentary, the project also helped local youths create online multimedia presentations on various community residents and the issues they've tackled.

"This project has helped build awareness and pride, and helped sustain a movement," ross said.

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