

Electronic Press Kit (EPK): SMALL IS BEAUTIFUL

I. Film Overview

- **Title:** Small Is Beautiful
- **Genre:** Documentary / Environmental / Social Justice
- **Duration:** 25 Minutes
- **Location:** Sonoma Valley, California (Valley of the Moon)

Logline: **SMALL IS BEAUTIFUL** explores the challenges facing a small rural community waging a fierce battle against a massive luxury development threatening to engulf a wildlife sanctuary and a community's way of life.

II. Synopsis

Small Is Beautiful explores the high-stakes battle over the future of the Sonoma Developmental Center (SDC). For more than a century, this state-owned 180-acre campus served as a sanctuary for people with disabilities. Today, it stands at the center of a contentious redevelopment fight. Although California law required public input on the site's future, hundreds of residents who spent more than seven years collaborating with local nonprofits to craft a thoughtful plan—prioritizing affordable housing and protection of a vital wildlife corridor—were blindsided when the property was quietly sold to a notorious developer. The new proposal: a luxury resort, hotel, retail complex, and nearly 1,000 upscale homes.

Set against California's intensifying wildfire crisis, the documentary examines the growing tension between rapid development and environmental stewardship. As climate change drives longer and more destructive fire seasons, this rural community faces the peril of dense construction in a fire-prone landscape served primarily by narrow country roads.

Nestled between Eldridge and Glen Ellen at the base of Sonoma Mountain, the SDC sits in a state-designated high fire severity zone within an ecologically sensitive wildlife corridor. While Sonoma Mountain itself has not experienced a major burn in over a century, the surrounding Valley has endured catastrophic wildfires in recent years. The site therefore lies in a region already tested by disaster, where long-unburned fuels, extreme weather, and limited evacuation routes combine to heighten risk. Despite these realities, the state has advanced the large-scale luxury project without significant infrastructure improvements. Limited water supply and narrow two-lane roads raise urgent public safety concerns.

Through interviews with fire chiefs, biologists, environmental legal experts, and survivors of recent wildfires, *Small Is Beautiful* reveals how state housing mandates can override

environmental protections, placing fragile ecosystems and entire communities at risk. The film captures a local struggle with statewide implications, exposing the collision of development, climate-driven disasters, and public safety in the name of progress.

III. Key Interviewees (Cast/Experts)

- **Dr. Bean Anderson:** retired engineer, regional historian, and longtime community advocate, with a long-standing commitment to preserving local heritage and shaping responsible development. Serving on the board of the **Glen Ellen Historical Society**, he has been a central figure in several local nonprofit efforts challenging the **SDC development**, and was one of the principal authors of the “alternative plan” that Judge D’Mao recognized as the superior blueprint for the state-owned site. Anderson combines technical expertise with civic engagement to advance thoughtful planning, historic preservation, and community-driven solutions. Having lived through the devastating 2017 wildfire, Anderson joined a team that commissioned an independent evacuation study of the Valley. The findings were stark: in a wildfire comparable to those that have already struck the region, full evacuation could take five to seven hours, not the 90 seconds that the Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the SDC had proposed.

- **Tom Deely and Matt Lage:** are Battalion Fire Chiefs with decades of frontline experience in wildfire response and emergency management. Drawing on their extensive knowledge of Sonoma County’s fire risks, they provide a sobering perspective on the shortcomings of current evacuation planning, describing the EIR’s estimates for evacuation as a “joke” versus the lethal reality of gridlocked escape routes during major wildfires. Their expertise highlights critical gaps in public safety infrastructure, emphasizing the urgent need for realistic, community-focused evacuation strategies to protect lives.

- **Wayne Stewart:** is a 28-year veteran firefighter in **San Francisco** and longtime **Sonoma Valley** resident, is a vocal critic of the **SDC development deal**. In his testimony, Stewart makes clear that the plan puts lives at risk, stating, “people will die if this deal goes through.” He highlights how public input—legally required for planning—was sidelined, noting, “it’s all about money ... the developers and the politicians work hand in hand.”

Together, these experts emphasize the urgent need for transparent decision-making, realistic evacuation planning, and responsible development to safeguard the community.

- **Dr. Dan Levitus:** is a biologist with decades of hands-on experience studying the flora and fauna of Sonoma County. He has conducted extensive fieldwork on the **SDC campus** and **Sonoma Mountain**, documenting thousands of species and gaining an intimate understanding of the region’s complex ecosystems. Levitus is recognized for his expertise in freshwater wetlands and wildlife corridors, and he provides critical insights into the ecological impacts of development, including the destruction of wetlands and the “pinch point” threatening the continuity of regional wildlife pathways. His work combines

rigorous scientific research with clear, accessible explanations, helping communities and policymakers understand and protect the natural heritage of the area.

- **Judith Olney:** is a seasoned environmental planning and communications specialist with expertise in environmental impact reporting (EIR) and nonprofit leadership. With extensive experience at the intersection of community engagement, land-use policy, and environmental review processes, she has guided complex EIR projects and facilitated public outreach to ensure inclusive stakeholder participation and regulatory compliance. In her work with nonprofits focused on sustainable development and equitable planning, Olney blends technical environmental analysis with strategic communication to advance environmentally responsible outcomes and support community-driven decision-making. Her leadership reflects a commitment to transparency, rigorous review standards, and collaborative problem-solving in environmental planning.
- **Dennis Richards:** is a San Francisco civic leader and housing policy advocate, best known for his service as a Commissioner on the **San Francisco Planning Commission** and his leadership in neighborhood advocacy. He is the founder and CEO of **Our Neighborhood Voices**, a statewide grassroots nonprofit and ballot initiative aimed at restoring local control over land-use, zoning, and housing decisions in California—challenging recent state laws that expand density mandates and reduce municipal discretion. The initiative he is spearheading would empower cities and counties to shape their own growth policies, prioritize community-defined affordable housing solutions, and preserve neighborhood character, with supporters organizing to qualify the measure for a future statewide ballot.

IV. Critical Issues & Talking Points

- **The Fire Safety Crisis:** The project adds thousands of cars to rural roads where, in 2017, five out of six evacuation routes were already on fire.
- **The "Luxury" Loophole:** Although the project is pushed under housing mandates, 88% of the units are luxury homes unaffordable to the average citizen.
- **Ecological Degradation:** The site is home to endangered Chinook salmon and acts as a primary corridor for thousands of migratory species.
- **Policy & Profits:** The film alleges that developers are "writing the legislation" and handing it to politicians to maximize profits at the expense of public safety.

Production Quotes

The documentary *Small Is Beautiful* details the conflict between community safety, environmental preservation, and urban development in Sonoma Valley. Below are the most powerful and impactful quotes from the transcript, organized by theme.

On the Environmental and community impact:

"It belongs to all the people of Sonoma Valley. And the whole notion that we should give it away to some developer to make money was just anathema to me. Once it's gone, it's gone forever."
— Dr. Bean Anderson

"In essence, this proposal amounts to dropping a small city into a wildlife sanctuary and rural region of Sonoma Valley." — Judith Olney

"The wildlife corridor extends from the ocean through the Mayacamas - and that corridor all comes down to a tiny little pinch point of about a mile to two miles in the Sonoma Developmental Center... with this development there's gonna be lights, fences, pets, noise all night. It's just killing that wildlife corridor." — Dr. Bean Anderson

On Fire Safety and Human Life:

"If I have a restaurant and I chain the doors shut where people can't get out, I'll be held criminally liable. What's the difference about building a bunch of homes and giving you one way out?" — Tom Deely, Fire Chief SDC

"I would be utterly panicked... people would die. There's no question if a fire replicated anything close to 2017. Our land was ablaze. Our beautiful home was, it just vanished."
— Elizabeth (local resident)

"Sonoma has six ways in and out of this valley and in 2017, five of those six routes were on fire."
— Matt Lage, Fire Chief

"You're asking for disaster... You would think they would have occupancy loads for neighborhoods." — Tom Deely, Fire Chief

On Development and Political Influence

"The phrase 'follow the money'—it applies here a hundred percent. These developers are gonna get rich and the politicians will follow suit. I've never met a poor developer, nor have I met a poor politician." — Wayne Stewart, Veteran Fireman

"The control is in the developer camp, not in the public sphere. They actually are writing the legislation. They literally write the law and hand it to the senator or the assembly person and say, 'We'd like for you to pass this.'" — Dennis Richards

"Developers build houses to make money. They're not in the business of creating affordable units... Luxury units account for 85, 90, 95% of the housing productions actually would be built."
— Dennis Richards

"The community's engagement was manipulated to prevent or preemptively quash any organized public opposition to simply selling the land to the highest bidder." — Narrator

The Final Word

"Why is public land funded by taxpayers money being allowed to be privatized and commodified without public consent?" — Narrator

"If you follow the river up to the development bonanza and urban sprawl... you will find the state of California's housing mandates and high-end developers whose only objective is to maximize profits." — Narrator

VI. Media Assets (Placeholder)

- **Trailer:**



- **High-Res Stills:** * Aerial view of the SDC campus and wildlife corridor.
 - Protest footage of Sonoma Valley residents.
 - Archival footage of the devastating 2017 and 2020 fires in Sonoma County.

Director Bio: Carolyn M. Scott is an Emmy-nominated, award-winning filmmaker, visual storyteller, creative director, and environmental educator with more than 25 years of experience spanning education, environmental advocacy, and film.

Scott directed the Emmy-nominated feature documentary *TEXAS GOLD*, an intimate portrait of Gulf Coast shrimper and environmental activist Diane Wilson as she confronts petrochemical corporations polluting her community. The film screened at more than 30 international festivals and was acquired for national broadcast by Sundance Channel and PBS. Her award-winning feature documentary *SMALL IS BEAUTIFUL* follows a rural California community fighting a massive luxury development threatening a wildlife sanctuary and their way of life, set against the backdrop of increasing wildfire risk and climate instability. She also directed and produced *ROUNDUP WINE*, a satirical animated short examining the presence of glyphosate in California wines, bringing humor and visual storytelling to environmental health research.

In recognition of her work, Scott received the *Women Taking the Lead to Save the Planet!* Award from the National Women's History Project, a one time honor shared with 100 other women worldwide including Jane Goodall, Helen Caldicott and Rachel Carson.

In addition to her filmmaking, Scott has worked as an environmental educator and curriculum developer in the San Francisco Bay Area, teaching in low-income public schools and creating original curricula focused on endangered species, environmental stewardship, and experiential science education.

She is also a founding partner of Cool Planet Labs, a nonprofit think tank dedicated to mass mobilization around climate solutions. There, she leads creative direction and storytelling strategy and is currently developing EarthAtlas, a youth-led solution library designed to empower students and educators to co-create a living atlas of nature-based climate solutions.

Scott's work bridges art, advocacy, and education—amplifying community voices and advancing stories that inspire resilience, accountability, and collective action.

Editors Bio: Denny Thomas is an Emmy-, Peabody-, and American Cinema Editors (ACE “Eddie”)-winning documentary film and television editor celebrated for his work on some of the most impactful nonfiction series in contemporary broadcast media. His editorial craft has been featured on major networks and platforms including ABC News, A&E Networks, and HBO's *Vice*, where his work contributed to critically acclaimed storytelling recognized with top honors in the industry.

Based in New York City and originally from New Delhi, India, Thomas brings a nuanced and cinematic editorial voice to projects that span investigative journalism, cultural history, and exploratory documentary formats. His television editing credits include *Vice*, *Vice News Tonight*, *Soul of a Nation*, *Unidentified: Inside America's UFO Investigation*, *Explained*, and *20/20*, among others, as well as documentary shorts like *Small Is Beautiful*.

Thomas's work is known for its textured storytelling and deft handling of vérité footage, archival material, and complex narrative structures. His editing has not only earned industry accolades but helped shape stories that resonate with audiences across festivals, public television, and streaming outlets.

Respected for his collaborative spirit, editorial rigor, and ability to elevate both character-driven and thematic dimensions of nonfiction work, Thomas continues to be a sought-after editor in documentary and long-form television production.

Composer's Bio: Catherine Joy is an award-winning composer, music producer, community leader, and educator specializing in original scores for film, television, games, and media. Originally from Tasmania, Australia, she has built an international career creating compelling music for documentaries, narrative features, and series across platforms including **HBO, Hulu, Disney, Sony, Discovery, and the History Channel**. Her work has earned recognition such as Best Documentary Score for *Gold Balls*, an ASCAP Composers Choice Award nomination for *Naughty Books*, and the David Raksin Emerging Talent Award for *Home Is A Hotel*, which won top honors at the *San Francisco International Film Festival*.

Catherine is the founder and CEO of **Joy Music House**, a full-service score production company, and served as President of the **Alliance for Women Film Composers**, now continuing on its advisory board. She also teaches film scoring as adjunct faculty at **NYU Steinhardt's Screen Scoring Masters Program**, blending artistic creativity with mentorship. Her diverse body of work includes scoring acclaimed documentaries, narrative films, and series, as well as producing and orchestrating music for projects like *Minari* and *Presumed Innocent*.

Drone Cinematography: Jim Codington is an adventurer, wildlife photographer, and conservationist with a lifetime of extraordinary experiences spanning the globe. Born in Fort Collins, Colorado, he began his journey as a whitewater guide and expedition leader in the Grand Canyon and Amazon, where he conducted primate research and lived among indigenous tribes. After earning his veterinary degree from UC Davis, he practiced large-animal medicine for forty years and contributed to cheetah and lion conservation projects in Africa.

A lifelong thrill-seeker, Jim has survived multiple near-death experiences, numerous injuries, and extreme endurance challenges, including competing in the world's toughest Eco Challenge. His passion for photography has taken him from the Arctic Circle to the Amazon rainforest, capturing wildlife and indigenous cultures, earning recognition as a semifinalist in the **BBC Wildlife Photographer of the Year** competition, with work exhibited at the **De Young Museum**.

Jim combines scientific expertise, hands-on conservation, and a spirit of adventure to inspire curiosity, respect for nature, and a deep appreciation for life.

Director of Photography and Sound Design: **Gary D. Liess**, a longtime Sonoma resident, is an accomplished photographer, cinematographer, sound designer, and visual storyteller who has collaborated on several projects with **Carolyn M. Scott**. As Director of Photography on this film, Liess brings a discerning eye, an attentive presence, and profound sensitivity to capturing the essence of the people and stories on screen. A master of light and sound, he creates an

immersive, almost magical atmosphere for interviews, allowing each subject's personality and story to shine. Working closely with Scott, he nurtures her vision, using their shared lens and sonic design to let the narrative unfold naturally and authentically.

