



February 2012
Volume 49 No. 2

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Don't Miss

the deadline for your high school's Sierra Club Eco-Grant:

Feb. 14

- see page 3



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SANTA LUCIAN

Protecting and Preserving the Central Coast



The official newsletter of the Santa Lucia Chapter of the Sierra Club • San Luis Obispo County, California

Eat Food? Sign Here

Help get your right to know on the ballot

It's time to require the labeling of genetically modified foods.

Polls show that more than 80 percent of California voters want to know if their food was produced using genetic engineering –potatoes altered with bacteria genes, corn altered to produce pesticide, “super” pigs altered with human growth genes, tomatoes altered with fish genes, fish altered with cattle growth genes, etc.

But in the near future, you may suddenly start hearing arguments against your right to know what you're eating.

That's because the Committee for the Right to Know, a grassroots coalition of consumer, public health and environmental organizations and food companies in California, has submitted the California Right to Know Genetically Engineered Food

Act to the State Attorney General for circulation as an initiative measure. Proponents have until April 12 to obtain the 504,760 valid signatures needed to qualify the initiative for the November ballot.

Of course, the industry-backed groups that will be making arguments against informing consumers and in

favor of ignorance won't put it that way. Locally, we may see an attempt to re-fight the battle over Measure Q, the 2004 ballot initiative that sought to ban the cultivation of genetically engineered crops in SLO County. But this initiative simply seeks the labeling of genetically engineered foods, aka genetically modified organisms (GMOs), so pulling out old arguments about taking away the right of farmers to choose to plant genetically engineered corn or soybeans won't apply. This is about your right to choose what you put in your body.

You may hear arguments about the burdensome costs to industry of labeling (probably referred to as a “tax.”) Since consumer labeling is a long established, non-burdensome practice, this, too, won't be much of an argument.

You'll hear the argument that there is simply no need to label GMOs because they are perfectly safe. But fifty countries, including China, Japan and the entire European Union, require the labeling of genetically engineered food. The United States continues to allow GMOs to be sold unlabeled, with the determination of their safety left up to the manufacturer and no toxicology testing by the Food and Drug Administration — essentially the largest ongoing science experiment in history, being conducted without the consent of the experimental subjects and despite the



Look for this When you see this sign outside your favorite grocery store over the next two months, sign up!

We Move to Amend!

by Gary Steinmann, Move to Amend of San Luis Obispo County

On January 21, 2010, with its ruling in *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission*, the Supreme Court ruled that corporations are persons, entitled by the U.S. Constitution to buy elections and run our government.

But human beings are people; corporations are legal fictions.

Move To Amend of San Luis Obispo County is a registered affiliate

group of the national Move To Amend organization. We, the People of the United States of America, reject *Citizens United* and move to amend our Constitution to firmly establish that money is not speech, and that human beings, not corporations, are persons entitled to constitutional rights.

The goal of MTA-SLOCo is to raise our community's awareness of this issue and help gather support for the Resolution to Amend.

We are looking for motivated people to join us as we begin to get the MTA message out to the community. Volunteers will be needed to help us put on events, man tables at various locations (Farmer's Markets, grocery stores, etc), distribute flyers, and other activities. If you would like to be put on our volunteers list, please contact Rosey805@gmail.com or ppcc.infobox@gmail.com.

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Explore, enjoy and protect the planet

Truth and Consequences

Coming Clean
 The blog of Sierra Club Executive Director
 Michael Brune



It's another warm, dry, sunny day here in San Francisco today. Highs might hit 70 degrees. Temperatures are in the 80s in Los Angeles, with a high of 90 in Fullerton.

It's January 5. Has the weather been weird where you are, too? Too hot? Too wet? Not wet enough? Our family was eagerly anticipating a holiday trip to the slopes of the Sierra Nevada. No one was more excited than my son, Sebastian, who was all set to buckle on his first pair of skis. Only problem: Nothing to ski on except man-made snow thinly spread over what the locals half seriously refer to as "Sierra cement." Not ideal conditions for a three-year-old just learning to find his ski legs.

Turns out we would have had about as much luck finding snow on the Fourth of July. This has been the fourth-driest July-December in the northern Sierra Nevada since 1923. We're not ready to start panicking just yet, but there's a lot more at stake than Sebastian's first ski lesson. California relies on the Sierra snowpack for two-thirds of its water supply.

You could argue that this record dry spell in Northern California is a fluke. It's still early in the season, so I certainly wouldn't hold it up as proof of global climate disruption. What's harder to dismiss, though, is the pattern of extreme weather — and disasters — that's emerging around the planet.

Globally, the summer of 2011 was the third hottest on record. In the U.S., it was our second hottest summer ever. The ratio of record-high-temperature days to record-low-temperature days across the U.S. was 2.8 to 1. From 2000 to 2009, that ratio was about 2 to 1. From the 1950s through the 1970s, it was closer to even, but from the 1980s on, each decade has had an ever-greater proportion of record hot days.

Unfortunately, extreme weather has grave consequences. Last year the world experienced an unprecedented number of weather-related disasters. Texas suffered a devastating drought that killed as many as half a million trees and reduced the state's cattle herd by 12 percent — more than at any time since the Great Depression. On the other side of the planet, the failure of the seasonal rains in East Africa led to tragic drought and famine that took the lives of an estimated 30,000 children under the age of five. Meanwhile, Thailand, Australia, Colombia, and Brazil all experienced floods that were either the deadliest or the most costly natural disasters in their histories.

The U.S. had major floods, too, but most of our weather-related natural disasters involved tornadoes and other storms. Iowa was just one of the Midwestern states that had heightened tornado activity, including a series of twisters in May that destroyed two-thirds of Joplin, MO, and killed 161 people.

Still, even though Iowa got off relatively lightly in terms of extreme weather last year, it suffered an influx of extreme candidates during its Republican caucus. Not a single candidate there was ready to talk seriously about climate disruption, carbon pollution, or the importance of moving beyond fossil fuels. They are impervious to data. Most of them won't even admit that global warming is an established truth — including the governor of the state that just experienced not just its own hottest summer, but the hottest summer of any state ever.

That's almost as weird (and at least as scary) as the weather.

Donate to the Peter Douglas Coastal Fellowship Fund

The Peter Douglas Coastal Fellowship Fund has been established to promote public service and cultivate the next generation of coastal stewards in California as a tribute to Peter's legacy of environmental leadership in the state. Funds will be used to place a diverse group of talented individuals in mentored fellowships at the California Coastal Commission.

Peter Douglas has been the California Coastal Commission's third and longest-serving Executive Director. He was a key player in the drafting and passage of Proposition 20 (the Coastal Initiative) in 1972, as well as the California Coastal Act of 1976, which created the Coastal Commission. He has guided its implementation ever since. Peter retired from his position as Executive Director in November 2011 for health reasons.

The Monterey Bay Sanctuary Foundation administers the fund on behalf of the California Coastal Commission, as a nonprofit partner.

Peter is a devout believer in Joseph Campbell's advice that the way to live one's life is to follow your bliss. His bliss, as well as his passion and avocation are and will continue to be environmental stewardship. During his 34-year tenure at the Coastal Commission, Peter earned the love, respect and loyalty of his staff, and has served as an inspiration to environmental advocates and stewards statewide and beyond. Peter's commitment and vision for the California coast as a precious and irreplaceable resource for everyone has never wavered.

When asked if he had any idea when he started out what sort of a legacy he would create for the people of California, his reply was "Absolutely not. I never thought about it. I just thought it was noble work, and I wanted to make a difference."

Donate on line at www.mbnmsf.org/pages/supportus.html. You may also give by mail or phone: The Monterey Bay Sanctuary Foundation, 299 Foam Street, Suite D, Monterey, CA 93940. Telephone: 831-647-4209.

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The Executive Committee meets the third Monday of every month at 5:30 p.m. at the chapter office, located at 974 Santa Rosa St., San Luis Obispo. All members are welcome to attend.

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Outings, events, and more!



The winners The Morro Bay High School Environmental Club won a Sierra Club Eco-Grant last year to build a compost/vermiculture bin for the school garden that could accommodate food waste from the cafeteria.

Our 2012 High School Eco-Grants Program is Accepting Applications

In 2012, the Santa Lucia chapter of the Sierra Club is awarding eco-grants up to a maximum of \$350 to public and private high schools in SLO County for students' group environmental projects. The application process has been kept deliberately simple.

The deadline for application is **Tuesday, February 14th**. Applications received after that date will be considered if funds are still available after the initial round of awards. Recipients will be notified and funds available by March 1st.

The funds support special projects—ones that have not already been done routinely—that demonstrably benefit the local environment and/or environmental awareness and need support for success.

Projects must be administered by a faculty member, who is also the primary author of the application (below). Funds will be payable to the school (or district, if preferred).

Substantial involvement from at least five or more students in carrying

out the project is expected. Student involvement in its design is a plus.

A high school may submit several project proposals, but usually only one from each school can be funded, to maximize the number of schools able to participate.

Proposals can come from any academic area, any level from 9th through 12th grades, or from a student group recognized within the school. They can take place on campus or in the community.

A brief progress report (1-2 typed pages) is asked about the implementation of the project, submitted by June 1st. Projects should be completed by the end of the Spring semester or substantial progress made by that time.

Contributions to the eco-grant fund are derived solely from individual contributions and are tax-deductible. Send a check made out to "The Sierra Club Foundation," with "Santa Lucia Chapter eco-grants" on the memo line, to Sierra Club, P.O. Box 15755, San Luis Obispo, CA 93406.

ECO-GRANT APPLICATION

Please include the following information:

Part I: Identifying Data

Name of high school and street address.

Name of faculty sponsor, email address, and phone.

Description of student group (e.g., an academic class or earth club) who would do the project.

Part II: Project Description (500 words or less)

Describe the nature of project and how it might benefit the environment or awareness.

Describe the materials needed and their specific costs and budget.

Describe how project will be carried out: the student and faculty activities.

CRITERIA FOR ACCEPTANCE OF PROPOSALS

On-time submission and clarity/specificity of the application.

Benefit to the environment and/or awareness.

Efficiency in use of funds (e.g., use of student-made rather than purchased materials; fundraising to partially offset costs).

Level and breadth of student involvement.

Demonstration of environmental understanding and creativity.

Applications and inquiries should be directed to Joe Morris, Chapter Outings Chair, at dpj1942@earthlink.net. Phone: 805-772-1875.



More winners The Atascadero Greenhounds at the May 2011 Sierra Club meeting.

A comment to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in support of the proposed termination of the Southern Sea Otter Translocation Program — an end to the "No-Otter" Zone

Rachel Jacobson
Acting Assistant Secretary
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
4401 N. Fairfax Dr. MS 2042 – PDM
Arlington, VA 22203



RE: Termination of the Southern Sea Otter Translocation Program - SUPPORT

Dear US Fish and Wildlife Service Leadership and Staff:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Final Revised Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (DSEIS) on the translocation program for southern sea otters. We would like to thank you for your hard work and leadership to help recover the southern sea otter population along California's coast. In the past, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) convened a new Recovery Team, adopted a new Recovery Plan, published a Final Stock Assessment Report, and a Revised DSEIS. Most notably, the USFWS has released a Proposed Rule and the Final Revised DSEIS proposing to end the translocation program and allow sea otters already in the management zone to remain there. The USFWS has demonstrated remarkable leadership in coming to this decision. Thank you.

On behalf of The Otter Project, a nonprofit organization dedicated to the recovery of the California sea otter and near shore ocean health, Ocean Conservancy, Save Our Shores, The Marine Mammal Center, Oceana, and the Santa Lucia Chapter of the Sierra Club, we respectfully submit the following comments in support of the Proposed Rule and Alternative 3C (Preferred Alternative) of the USFWS Revised Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (DSEIS) for the southern sea otter translocation program. Alternative 3C (Preferred Alternative) declares the translocation program and management zone a failure, removes all associated management actions, terminates the program, and allows otters residing within the translocation and/or management zones to remain there.

We applaud the USFWS for identifying Alternative 3C as the preferred alternative and strongly urge you to adopt this alternative and terminate the translocation program. The translocation program failed to meet its stated purpose to aid in the recovery and management of the southern sea otter to a sustainable population and delisting under the Endangered Species Act. This was to be accomplished by establishing southern sea otter populations in one or more areas within their historical habitat, thereby minimizing the possibility that a single natural or human-caused catastrophe, such as an oil spill, could adversely affect a significant portion of the population.

The translocation of sea otters to San Nicolas Island has not resulted in an established population sufficient to repopulate the southern area of the otters' historic range should a catastrophic event affect the central coast mainland population. Maintenance of the management zone has proven to be challenging and poses greater risks to sea otters removed from the management zone, as well as to sea otters in the parent population upon reintroduction which may prevent recovery of the species.

The USFWS has put forth six potential actions for consideration taking into account the failure of the translocation program to meet its original objective. It is our strong opinion that Alternative 3C is the only action that maximizes the likelihood of recovery of the southern sea otter to a healthy and sustainable population level. It is also the alternative that will most likely achieve restoration of the marine ecosystem to a similar state that existed prior to sea otters eradication from the region.

Specifically, Alternative 3C:

- Fully restores protections under the Endangered Species Act by removing the exemption that allows incidental take of sea otters in the management and translocation zones, maximizing protection from incidents due to human interactions.

- Permanently ends efforts to capture and remove sea otters from the management and translocation zones, eliminating associated increased mortality risks and minimizing potential social disruption and competition for resources by reintroducing San Nicolas Island sea otters to the parent population.

- Allows sea otters unrestrained access to reclaim their historic range maximizing the potential for natural population growth and range expansion, which are necessary for achieving the USFWS recovery and management goals.

- Allows sea otters to resume their role as a keystone species, restoring the kelp forest ecosystems and thus enhancing ecosystem productivity and biodiversity. This will result in improved recreational opportunities for finfish fishermen, divers, photographers, and other consumptive and non-consumptive recreational users. It will also benefit commercial finfish fisheries whose target species use kelp forest ecosystems as habitat and nursery areas.

We acknowledge that Alternative 3C may have unfavorable effects on some commercial fisheries, but we believe the benefits gained by a greater segment of the public, and the overall positive impacts to the marine ecosystem of the southern California coast outweigh the marginal impacts.

In summary, Alternative 3C is the only alternative that fully supports recovery and management goals and eventual delisting of the southern sea otter. Furthermore, it is the only alternative that provides significant positive benefits to the southern sea otter population, the southern California marine ecosystem, and the people of California and the nation. We strongly urge the USFWS to adopt Alternative 3C terminating the program.

Thank you very much for your consideration.

Sincerely,

C. Bradley Hunt, Program Manager, The Otter Project
Kaitilin Gaffney, Pacific Program Director, Ocean Conservancy
Laura Kasa, Executive Director, Save Our Shores
Dr. Jeff Boehm, Executive Director, The Marine Mammal Center
Dr. Geoffrey Shester, California Program Director, Oceana
Andrew Christie, Director, Santa Lucia Chapter of the Sierra Club

Nuclear Watchdog Grows More Teeth

John Geesman to lead Alliance for Nuclear Responsibility's legal intervention at CPUC seismic hearings



Woof! The Alliance for Nuclear Responsibility's Rochelle Becker and David Weisman at a California Public Utilities Commission hearing.

The Alliance for Nuclear Responsibility has retained veteran energy policy leader John Geesman as legal counsel in their proceedings before the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC).

Geesman's long career in energy policy includes a term as executive director of the California Energy Commission (CEC) during Jerry Brown's first term as governor, serving as a commissioner on the CEC and chair of the California Power Exchange. He was a prominent opponent of PG&E's Proposition 16, which went down to defeat in 2010 (see Geesman's article "Peter Darbee's Dog of an Initiative" in the April 2010 *Santa Lucian*).

The Alliance is intervening in PG&E's request for \$64 million in ratepayer funding for seismic studies at Diablo Canyon—an increase of \$47 million over their initial proposal. Questions have been raised regarding not only the cost but the merits of the scope of the study. "The fact that the CPUC staff could recently rubber-stamp Southern California Edison's proposed seismic studies for the San Onofre nuclear plant without review by any seismic experts shows what we're up against," said Geesman.

The CPUC has failed to hire a single seismologist, even though it was directed to independently review Diablo Canyon and San Onofre seismic studies before seeking license renewal.

The concerns that arose in the wake of the San

Bruno gas explosion and revelations about the CPUC and PG&E's negligent oversight are justifiably magnified when addressing California's aging—and seismically vulnerable—nuclear reactors. "San Bruno was tragic," said Alliance outreach coordinator David Weisman, "San Bruno plus radiation would be catastrophic."

On January 23, the CPUC's Independent Peer Review Panel held its first "public" meeting, with less than ten days notice. It was obvious to all in the room that PG&E was running the meeting. Geesman attended the haphazard meeting and afterward fired off a letter to CPUC Executive Director Paul Clennon detailing the severe deficiencies he'd witnessed there, noting CPUC staff's obvious unfamiliarity with the requirements of the Bagley-Keene Open Meetings Act and that "their failure to properly advise the IPRP members thereof requires immediate correction."

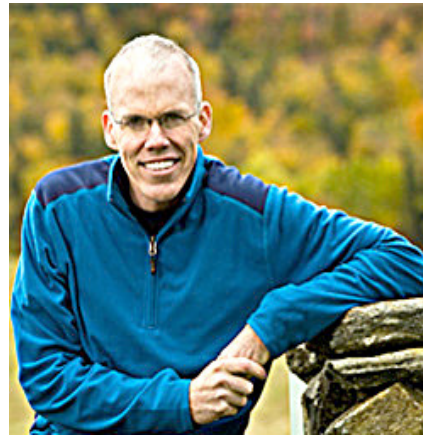
Geesman finds a worthy ally in the Alliance. "More than any other organizations working on nuclear issues, A4NR is focused on forcing the California government to do its job," he said. "I want to help them do that."

Rochelle Becker, executive director of the Alliance and chair of the Santa Lucia Chapter's Diablo Canyon Task Force, is equally enthusiastic about the partnership, saying, "Nobody finds the dry rot in our regulatory system more effectively than John Geesman, and it is an honor to have him represent us."

Testimony and hearings for PG&E's seismic funding case at the CPUC get under way this month.



On point Geesman.



Time to Stop Being Cynical About Corporate Money in Politics and Start Being Angry

By Bill McKibben
TomDispatch.com, January 7, 2012

As he showed with the ongoing dispute over the Keystone XL pipeline, when he sets his mind to it, Bill McKibben has a way of making us take another look at the previously accepted and acceptable.

My resolution for 2012 is to be naïve — dangerously naïve.

I'm aware that the usual recipe for political effectiveness is just the opposite: to be cynical, calculating, an insider. But if you think, as I do, that we need deep change in this country, then cynicism is a sucker's bet. Try as hard as you can, you're never going to be as cynical as the corporations and the harem of politicians they pay for. It's like trying to outchant a Buddhist monastery.

Here's my case in point, one of a thousand stories people working for social change could tell: All last fall, most of the environmental movement, including 350.org, the group I helped found, waged a fight against the planned Keystone XL pipeline that would bring some of the dirtiest energy on the planet from Canada through the U.S. to the Gulf Coast. We waged our struggle against building it out in the open, presenting scientific argument, holding demonstrations, and attending hearings. We sent 1,253 people to jail in the largest civil disobedience action in a generation. Meanwhile, more than half a million Americans offered public comments against the pipeline, the most on any energy project in the nation's history.

And what do you know? We won a small victory in November, when President Obama agreed that, before he could give the project a thumbs-up or -down, it needed another year of careful review. (The previous version of that review, as overseen by the State Department, had been little short of a crony capitalist farce.) Given that James Hansen, the government's premier climate scientist, had said that tapping Canada's tar sands for that pipeline would, in the end, essentially mean "game over for the climate," that seemed an eminently reasonable course to follow, even if it was also eminently political.

A few weeks later, however, Congress decided it wanted to take up the question. In the process, the issue went from out in the open to behind closed doors in money-filled rooms. Within days, and after only a couple of hours of hearings that barely mentioned the key scientific questions or the dangers involved, the House of Representatives voted 234-194 to force a quicker review of the pipeline. Later, the House attached its demand to the must-pass payroll tax cut.

That was an obvious pre-election year attempt to put the president on the spot. Environmentalists are at least hopeful that the White House will now reject the permit. After all, its communications director said that the rider, by hurrying the decision, "virtually guarantees that the pipeline will not be approved."

As important as the vote total in the House, however, was another number: within minutes of the vote, Oil Change International had calculated that the 234 Congressional representatives who voted aye had received \$42 million in campaign contributions from the fossil-fuel industry; the 193 nays, \$8 million.

Buying Congress

I know that cynics — call them realists, if you prefer — will be completely unsurprised by that. Which is precisely the problem.

We've reached the point where we're unfazed by things that should shake us to the core. So, just for a moment, be naïve and consider what really happened in that vote: the people's representatives who happen to have taken the bulk of the money from those energy companies promptly voted on behalf of their interests.

They weren't weighing science or the national interest; they weren't balancing present benefits against future costs. Instead of doing the work of legislators, that is, they were acting like employees. Forget the idea that they're public servants; the truth is that, in every way that matters, they work for Exxon and its kin. They should, by rights, wear logos on their lapels like NASCAR drivers.

If you find this too harsh, think about how obligated you feel when someone gives you something. Did you get a Christmas present last month from someone you hadn't remembered to buy one for? Are you going to send them an extra-special one next year?

And that's for a pair of socks. Speaker of the House John Boehner, who insisted that the Keystone approval decision be speeded up, has gotten \$1,111,080 from the fossil-fuel industry during his tenure. His Senate counterpart Mitch McConnell, who shepherded the bill through his chamber, has raked in \$1,277,208 in the course of his tenure in Washington.

If someone had helped your career to the tune of a million dollars, wouldn't you feel in their debt? I would. I get somewhat less than that from my employer, Middlebury College, and yet I bleed Panther blue. Don't ask me to compare my school with, say, Dartmouth unless you want a biased answer, because that's what you'll get. Which is fine — I am an employee.

But you'd be a fool to let me referee the homecoming football game. In fact, in any other walk of life we wouldn't think twice before concluding that paying off the referees is wrong. If the Patriots make the Super Bowl, everyone in America would be outraged to see owner Robert Kraft trot out to midfield before the game and hand a \$1,000 bill to each of the linesmen and field judges. If he did it secretly, the newspaper reporter who uncovered the scandal would win a Pulitzer. But a political reporter who bothered to point out

GET ANGRY continued on page 10



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Exploding Transformers

By John Stephens, Redwood Chapter Redwood Needles, Dec. 2011

Two thousand miles north of here, in the quiet, wind swept waters of the Arctic, the gregarious talkative white whales are exhibiting breast cancer. The decline of Beluga Whales is attributed in large part to Polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) being concentrated in their tissues through bio-accumulation. PCBs are extremely persistent and accumulate in living organisms, from microbes to human breast milk. Many studies have found confirmed that human breast milk has four to ten times the amount of PCBs than in the mothers' blood.

PCBs have been linked to lower IQ levels in children and cancer of the biliary tract, breast, cervical, liver and uterus. Due to PCBs' toxicity, production was banned by the United States Congress in 1979 and by the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants in 2001. However, they continued to be allowed in this country for "totally enclosed uses" such as closed system transformers and capacitors. In certain "failure modes or out-of-specification conditions" such as high voltage spikes, the devices can leak, catch fire, or explode. PCBs were widely used in dielectric fluids as a coolant for electric motors, capacitors, and transformers. They are present in old refrigerator compressors and fluorescent ballasts, and utility pole transformers. In the early 1970s, the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation found that PCBs leaking from transformers and had contaminated the soil at the bottom of utility poles.

Exposure to PCBs comes from mainly eating contaminated food like fish, meat, and dairy products but also repairing damaged equipment and living next to contaminated sites can also put people at risk. I remember repairing old leaking PCB-containing transformers with my bare hands.

Last week I sat bolt upright out of bed with a realization. A few years ago a Pacific Gas & Electric step-down pole-mounted transformer exploded next door to my house on Minahen Street in Napa. The entire block lost its electrical service. The neighbor reported it to PG&E and a crew promptly removed the transformer and replaced it with a new unit. The crew did not clean up the PCB laced oil that had sprayed on the sidewalk, the asphalt street, or the dirt around the pole. Some of the material washed down into the storm drain that year and the rest soaked into the concrete, asphalt, and dirt. It is still there.

Since this is a persistent contaminant and there was apparently no mandatory protocol to follow requiring environmental remediation, I filed a formal complaint form at the California Department of Toxic Substances Control website describing the incident. Protocols need to be

Eat food?

continued from page 1

mounting evidence of adverse environmental and health effects.

That experiment is being conducted despite sharp dissent with the FDA's position that there is essentially no difference between GMOs and conventional crops and therefore no need for extensive testing – a dissent coming from the Union of Concerned Scientists, the UK Medical Research Council, the Royal Society of Canada, the American Academy of Environmental Medicine and the FDA's own scientists.

The doctrine of substantial equivalence, specifically the "no further testing required" version of it, was in large part the brainchild of one Michael R. Taylor, a former lawyer for Monsanto, the world's largest producer of genetically engineered seeds and herbicides for the crops grown from them. In 1991, Taylor became a deputy commissioner at the FDA long enough to have genetically engineered foods declared "substantially equivalent" to their conventional counterparts, thereby sparing his former employer the expense and

hassle of the lengthy testing that is normally required for new food products. Having thus secured billions of dollars in profit for Monsanto by allowing their products to be rushed to market, Taylor returned to the company, where he was named a vice president. (In his latest pass through the regulatory revolving door, Taylor returned to the FDA in 2009, where he now presides as the nation's food safety czar.)

Obviously, action at the federal level on labeling genetically engineered food is unlikely. Federal labeling legislation has been before Congress since 1999. It has failed to pass.

State governments have likewise failed. GMO labeling bills launched in Sacramento and in fourteen other states have died, testimony to the power of the ag biotech industry and its lobbyists.

California's ballot initiative process was designed for situations just like this, as a tool that allows the voters to implement the will of the people and go around the entrenched money interests when those interests have paralyzed our legislature.

In the last year, the USDA approved

five new GMO crops from Monsanto. In December, the Obama administration quietly approved two brand new Monsanto GMO seeds. That's why, when you are approached by someone with a clip board at a farmers market or outside a grocery store and asked if you would like to sign a petition to put the California Right to Know Genetically Engineered Food Act on the ballot, you should say yes. We don't have time to wait to ensure the safety of food for California families.

Petitions will also be available at the Sierra Club office at 974 Santa Rosa Street in SLO any weekday from February 20 through April 6, between 1 and 5 p.m. You can also sign up for training in gathering signatures by contacting jeannegmo@gmail.com. Get more information and read the text of the initiative at www.labelgmos.org.

The industry will fight this initiative primarily because they know that ideas that start in California tend to spread. Let's make that Happen. Now is the time to send a strong, direct message to those who govern us that we want genetically engineered foods labeled.



Taking Issue

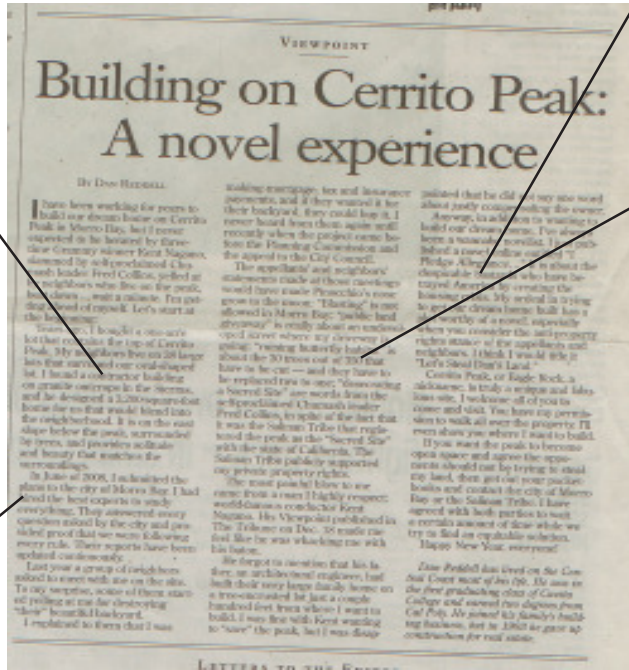
problematic environmental coverage & commentary in our local media

“Building on Cerrito Peak: A novel experience,” by Dan Reddell, *The Tribune*, Dec. 29, 2011.

Summary: Even though the Morro Bay City Council majority voted to hand him a development permit despite obvious deficiencies in his project’s environmental review and apparent conflicts with the city’s Local Coastal Plan, the owner of a residential lot on top of Morro Bay’s Cerrito Peak claimed his property rights were in danger and he was being persecuted by the public in his efforts to build a large house and 400-foot-long driveway on an archaeological site, in the midst of environmentally sensitive habitat. (All responses below are drawn from a Dec. 13, 2011, letter to the Morro Bay City Council from the California Coastal Commission)

“It appears the City has neglected to insure the sacred site is protected, as required by the LCP [Local Coastal Plan]... In addition, it appears that the City has not explored options for avoiding development on the site, as required by LCP Policy 4.07.”

I found a contractor...and he designed a 3,200-square-foot home for us that would blend into the neighborhood.



I welcome all of you to come and visit. You have my permission to walk all over the property. I'll even show you where I want to build.

“For such a significant site, the application should include

visual simulations showing the proposed project from several vantage points, as well as a story pole analysis that includes photographs of story poles taken from public locations.”

“Ruining butterfly habitat” is about the 30 trees out of 350 that have to be cut.

“The City should require an updated butterfly survey conducted at the appropriate time of year to inform the

determination as to where ESHA [Environmentally Sensitive Habitat Area] for monarch butterflies is located.... The project must be sited and designed to minimize any impacts on adjacent ESHA including the impacts caused by placing residence and human activity in close proximity to wildlife habitat. Because the City has not made a determination as to whether the site contains ESHA, and has not identified such ESHA on a map, it appears the City does not have the necessary information to evaluate the project for consistency with the certified LCP.”

“Surveys must be conducted by biologists with formal training in avian biology, significant field experience in raptor survey techniques, and demonstrated ability to accurately identify local species under a variety of conditions.”

I had hired the best experts to study everything. They answered every question asked by the city and provided proof that we were following every rule.

Upshot: City councils are not obligated to cover the bets of developers who buy lots and then hope they can find a way to build large projects on inappropriate sites, or demand public coffers be drained to purchase the land at jacked-up prices in order to preserve it. Having to follow the same rules governing land use as every body else is not a “property rights” issue.

“Get more nuclear plants to meet climate goals, state told,” by Mike Taugher, *Contra Costa Times*, printed in *The Tribune* Nov. 29, 2011.

Summary: A story about different energy paths California can take to cut greenhouse gas emissions turned into something else when it got to *The Tribune*.



Get more nuclear plants to meet climate goals, state told

Here’s the original headline on this story when it ran in the *Contra Costa Times*: “California energy report says state can slash greenhouse gases by another 80 percent.”

And here’s the headline on the *Electric Light & Power* website: “Electricity called key to reaching state climate goals.”

and in the Woodland, CA, *Daily Democrat*: “Energy report calls for more alternative power sources across California.”

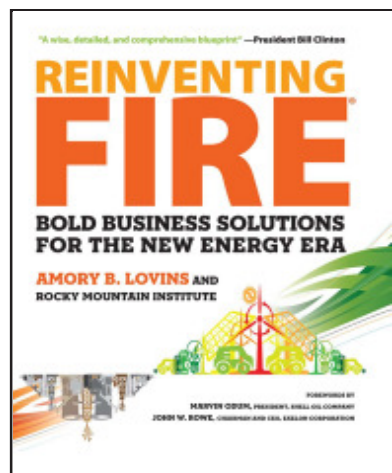
and in the *Miami Herald*: “Study: Californians must make big shift to electric power to meet long-term energy goals.”

The title of the study that was the subject of the article: “The Technology Path to Deep Greenhouse Gas Emissions Cuts by 2050: The Pivotal Role of Electricity.”

The equivalent of up to two nuclear power plants would have to be built each year between now and 2050 to meet the growing electricity demand, said one of the study’s co-authors, Margaret S. Torn, a biogeochemist at the Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory.

When we contacted Dr. Torn and brought the *Tribune*’s take on this story to her attention, she said “I was not advocating building nuclear power plants. The article looks at four approaches to generating low-carbon sources of electricity: Renewable energy, nuclear, Fossil+ CCS, and a ‘balanced’ case of all three. One could pursue RE + some fossil-CCS and reach the same goal with no nuclear. I happened to mention the nuclear example to give a sense of the infrastructure challenge.”

UPSHOT: In addition to the problems spotlighted since Fukushima, nuclear power is the most expensive way ever devised to generate electricity. The Rocky Mountain Institute, under the aegis of chief scientist Amory Lovins, one of the world’s leading authorities on energy, has introduced “Reinventing Fire: Profitable Solutions to Climate, Oil, and Proliferation,” as a plan built on 27 years of mapping pathways for running a 2050 U.S. economy 158 percent larger than today’s but with no oil, no coal, no nuclear energy, one-third less natural gas, at a \$5 trillion lower net cost. The plan is backed up by quantitative analysis, offering a vision to help catalyze innovative policies.

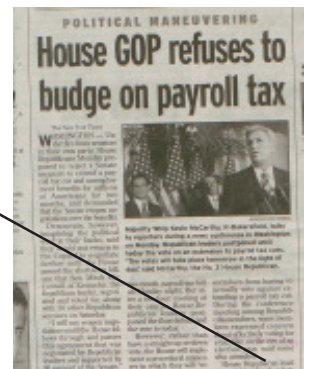


“House GOP refuses to budge on payroll tax,” *New York Times*, printed in *The Tribune*, Dec. 20, 2011.

Summary: At the end of 2011, House Republicans threatened to reject a deal to extend the payroll tax cut and unemployment benefits. Most of the media didn’t bother reporting the reason: the push to gut environmental regulations and fatten the profits of Big Oil and major polluters.

Multiple anti-environmental riders were attached to 2011 end-of-the-year spending bills. One of the Republican riders that held up the payroll tax cut extender bill required the President to decide the fate of the controversial Keystone XL pipeline within 60 days, despite the fact that environmental review would take at least a year. Another rider sought to kill health safeguards for toxic pollutants from industrial boilers and incinerators — some of the largest industrial sources of toxic air pollutants such as mercury and arsenic. On January 22, House Speaker John Boehner told Chris Wallace on *Fox News Sunday* that Congressional Republicans may -- again -- hold the next payroll tax cut extension hostage to the effort to force approval of the Keystone XL Pipeline. (Now forgotten: the previous alleged concern over the length of the tax cut.)

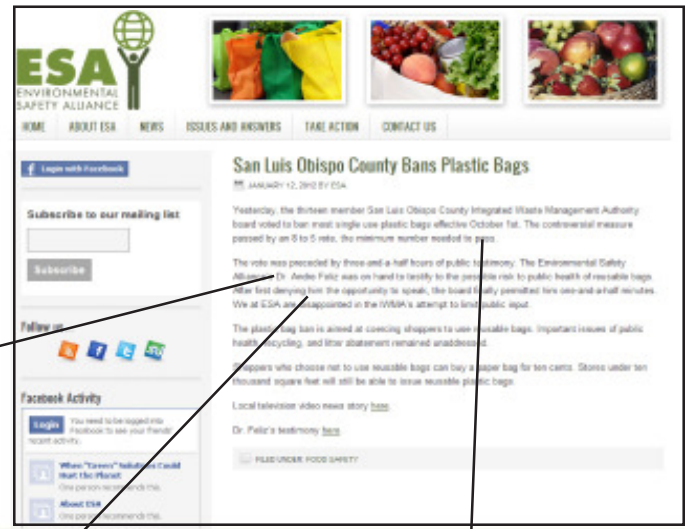
House Republican leaders said Monday that their objection was not to the tax cut itself, but to the temporary nature of the fix.



UPSHOT: The environmental community did an excellent job of fighting back some of the most egregious anti-environmental riders on the appropriation bills and continuing resolutions that passed Congress last year. The job done by the media in reporting the fights over those bills and what was really at stake: not so hot.

“San Luis Obispo County Bans Plastic Bags,” by Environmental Safety Alliance, Jan. 12, 2012.

Summary: The weekend before the January 11 vote on whether to ban environmentally destructive plastic bags in retail stores countywide, residents received a robo-call from the “Environmental Safety Alliance” inviting them to a “telephone town hall” on the alleged public health threat of reusable bags. One of the two doctors who hosted the town hall was quickly exposed as a doctor of musical arts. The other, Dr. Andre Feliz, M.D., came to the Jan. 11 meeting of the Integrated Waste Management Authority to testify.



“The industry maintains a list of doctors and scientists it can call on to defend the safety of its products. Virtually all of them are paid consultants. Asked if he can produce even one independent scientist to refute any of the recent studies [on the harmful effects of fire retardant chemicals], industry P.R. man Seth Jacobson comes up with Andre Feliz of the University of California, Davis. In a phone interview, Feliz, an M.D. now working on a postdoc, discussed the role of fire retardants in reducing fire fatalities and made an impassioned plea to keep them on the market. But Feliz also acknowledged that, while he had not yet taken any industry money, he was in the process of applying to the major manufacturers to fund his lab. Such sponsorship, he said, would also help him win a federal grant.”

The Environmental Safety Alliance’s Dr. Andre Feliz was on hand to testify to the possible risk to public health of reusable bags.

- “The poison crib: When protective chemicals harm. Scientists have new evidence of the dangers of flame retardants and their potential damage, especially on kids,” By Sheila Kaplan, [Salon.com](#), Jun. 10, 2010.

After first denying him the opportunity to speak, the board finally permitted him one-and-a-half minutes. We at ESA are disappointed in the IWMA’s attempt to limit public input.

No one was denied the opportunity to speak. Dr. Feliz was allotted three minutes, like everyone

else at the hearing who requested the same.

The controversial measure passed by an 8 to 5 vote, the minimum number needed to pass.

Sensing defeat just before the vote was taken, IWMA board member John Hamon

of the Paso Robles City Council deployed the parliamentary maneuver of calling for a “super vote,” which requires a super majority, not just a simple majority, to pass a measure. The ordinance promptly passed with a super majority.

Upshot: Organizations with “green” names that put up websites touting industry-funded studies and the corporate line on environmental and public health issues — and choose not to identify themselves or provide contact information — are known as “Astroturf.” Like individuals who fail to disclose the nature and extent of their involvement with an industry when testifying at public hearings, they suffer from an acute lack of credibility and don’t help their cause with bald misstatements of easily verified facts.

“Court sinks Sierra Club Dunes suit,” by David Sneed, *The Tribune*, Jan. 11, 2012.

Summary: In ruling against us in the appeal of our lawsuit *Sierra Club v. CA Dept. of Parks*, the court allegedly said the land use policy that bars off-road vehicles from the 584 acres of County-owned land in the Oceano Dunes, one-third of the Oceano Dunes State Vehicular Recreation Area, can never be implemented.



And here’s the rest of the story. The court noted – “somewhat ironically” – that it is also “too early” to compel State Parks to conform to the 28-year-old Local Coastal Plan (LCP) requirement to ban vehicles from the County-owned parcel. The court insisted in recasting the basis of our appeal – the need for State Parks to abide by the terms of the LCP in its management of Oceano Dunes – into a challenge to the Coastal Development Permit for the ODSVRA. The permit, issued in 1982, was silent on the specific issue of off-road vehicles on the County-owned land parcel in the dunes. The LCP, certified in 1984, explicitly banned vehicles on the County’s land.

A state Court of Appeals on Monday upheld a San Luis Obispo Superior Court decision that it is too late to review a coastal development permit issued in 1982 that allows off-highway vehicles on a 584-acre, county-owned parcel, called the La Grande Tract, within the park.

The key word missing at the end of the last sentence is “yet.” We argued, and the Superior Court agreed, that State Parks “will need to comply with the dictates of the County General Plan and LCP.” The court said that an administrative action, such as an LCP amendment, is needed to trigger the explicit requirement in the County’s LCP that “the [Oceano Dunes] General Development Plan (GDP) shall be revised in accordance with the Local Coastal Plan.” In other words, the County land in the OSVRA must become what the LCP designated to be, a buffer from the riding area... someday.

The Sierra Club had sued State Parks, arguing that the La Grande Tract is classified as a buffer area by San Luis Obispo County’s local coastal plan, and is, therefore, a non-vehicle area. Both courts ruled that State Parks is under no obligation to amend its general development plan to reflect this designation.

The Supervisors balked because the Sierra Club informed the County Planning Commission of the La Grande Tract’s “buffer” designation (a fact which County planners had conveniently failed to tell the commissioners, while deleting every reference to it from cited coastal policies) at the hearing that was supposed to formally approve the sale of the land. The off-roaders filed an appeal of the Planning Commission’s determination that the sale would be inconsistent with County land use policies. We prevailed at the Board of Supervisors and sank the sale.

State Parks offered to buy the La Grande Tract in 2007, but the County Board of Supervisors balked.

Presumptions are perhaps not the best foundations for court rulings. An appellate court judge in Ventura – who has likely never taken his life in his hands by trying to walk on the beach at the Oceano Dunes State Vehicular Recreation Area to test his “best interest of everyone” thesis — may be forgiven for misapprehending the web of political tensions that defines the relationship among the California Coastal Commission, the County, and the California Department of Parks as concerns the Oceano Dunes. But taken at face value, this judicial presumption actually upholds the argument of the Sierra Club: the Coastal Commission, the County and State Parks agreed to the provisions of our Local Coastal Plan in 1984. The presumption is that State Parks was supposed to implement those provisions.

“The presumption is that the Coastal Commission, the county and State Parks have weighed the competing interests and are acting in the best interest of everyone,” the judges’ ruling concluded.

Upshot: As courtroom losses go, this is one we’re happy to take in view of what we won over the four-year saga of clashing dunes lawsuits – and what the off-roaders lost. The sale of the County land to State Parks, which was proceeding on greased wheels, was scotched. The legal argument that the LCP can be ignored as mere “local regulation” that does not apply to the Oceano Dunes has been struck down and can never again be raised in court. The status quo of a forgotten LCP “buffer” provision that was fated to be ignored forever no longer holds. The table has been set.

Thud & Blunder



After twice running afoul of coastal laws, will the Cambria CSD finally take the hint on desal?

At the December 9 meeting of the California Coastal Commission in San Francisco, Cambria Community Services District Engineer Robert Gresens stepped to the microphone and attempted to defend the proposal to drill desalination test wells on Santa Rosa State Beach. The Santa Rosa Creek estuary is also a State Natural Preserve, and part of Cambria State Marine Park and the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary.

Gresens tried to "put in context" five years of failed attempts by the CCSD to assess the suitability of Cambria's beaches for a desalination water supply project:

"The Army Corps [of Engineers] and Cambria CSD need to do what's called an EIR/EIS for a water supply project," he said. "We don't necessarily know what that water supply project is at this point, whether it's desal or something else, quite frankly. So to do that, they need to gather data to define the alternatives that will be analyzed."

Coastal Commission staff knew better, and immediately refuted Gresens' "we don't necessarily know" gambit, replying "Staff fully expect that the Commission will see a proposal for a desal facility rather

than just water supply options. Last year, in September, the Corps issued two contracts that specifically are for environmental analysis for a desalination facility, and a design for a desalination facility.... The Corps' construction list for projects in 2013 includes the Cambria desalination facility."

It was not the first time the CCSD had tried and failed to get away with a strategy of deliberate vagueness at the Coastal Commission. In 2006, the CCSD had proposed conducting

geophysical surveys at San Simeon State Beach. The Coastal Commission noted that the District's plan violated Coastal Act provisions for public access, environmentally sensitive habitat areas, marine biological resources, visual resources, etc. The CCSD coyly withheld information about plans to build a desal facility in the vicinity if the test wells produced the desired results. Commissioners commented that the location was unacceptable for a desalination plant, the siting and construction of which

was the obvious goal of the survey project. For that and other reasons, many of which were to be heard again five years later when the CCSD tried again at another state beach, that was that: Permit denied.

The CCSD asked for a reconsideration of the Commission's denial, frantically offering to provide information about the plans for the desal plant which they had chosen not to disclose. As reconsideration of a

BLUNDER continued on page 10

Footwear in the News

UC Wildlife Research Team Seeks Single Socks

by UCANR NEWS

A University of California wildlife research team working in the Sierra Nevada is asking the public to donate clean, gently used socks for research on a rare weasel called the Pacific fisher.

Data being collected by UC scientists about the movements, habitat preferences and survival of fishers in the southern Sierra Nevada will be used to aid the multiple agencies, academic institutions, environmental groups, and mountain residents who are working together to ensure that long-term wildland management promotes forest health, wildfire control and wildlife conservation.

The team is part of the Sierra Nevada Adaptive Management Project (SNAMP), which is examining the effects of forest thinning, as currently done by the U.S. Forest Service out of concern for excessive fire risk.

But what kind of research could go through hundreds of socks a month?

After years of experimentation, the research team has determined that socks are the ideal receptacle for hanging fisher bait in trees. The baited socks are hung in trees in view of motion-activated cameras. As the animal moves, climbing the tree and chewing on the sock, the camera takes photos that allow the scientists to identify the species.

The researchers are going through 250 pairs a month, at a considerable cost, to create the "chicken in a sock" bait stations to survey the distribution of Pacific fishers in a 500-square-mile area of forest near Bass Lake.

Besides the cost, Rick Sweitzer, UC Berkeley wildlife biologist and project leader, is spending time in the Wal-Mart checkout line with a cart full of socks when he could be doing research.

The scientists don't need new socks; they would prefer old, unmatched, non-hole ones, something everyone has cluttering up their sock drawers.

In an effort to reduce, reuse and recycle, the SNAMP wildlife research team is putting out a call for lost and lonely socks. Socks may be delivered or mailed to 40799 Elliott Dr., Oakhurst CA 93644.

For more information, contact Anne Lombardo at amlombardo@ucdavis.edu. To read more about the research project visit the SNAMP website at <http://snamp.cnr.berkeley.edu>.

The Sock is on the Other Foot

Sierra Club Releases "When the Puppets Came to Town"



On the eve of the South Carolina Republican primary, Sierra Club's Voter Education Fund released "When the Puppets Came to Town," a parody of the Newt Gingrich SuperPAC ad, "When Mitt Romney Came to Town," and the latest video release for the Club's Real Republicans project.

The project includes a series of videos featuring the candidates' actual words coming from the mouths of corporate sock puppets uncannily designed in their likenesses. Multiple videos from the project are on view at realrepubs.com.

For the 2012 campaign, the "Real Republicans" project represents the first major effort by an environmental organization to fight back against the stream of misinformation scapegoating clean air, clean water, and public health safeguards and the agencies that implement them. New videos and initiatives will be launched throughout the primary campaign.

The Sierra Club Voter Education Fund's Real

Republicans project seeks to educate voters about the records of the 2012 GOP presidential candidates by highlighting their extreme positions on public health and other issues of critical importance to the American people, and encourage the public to find out more about the candidates and their positions on these issues.

Topaz Solar Farm construction is underway and will continue for the next three years.

For Project Information:
www.topazsolar.com

Questions?

Construction Liaison, Dawn Legg:
(480) 390-6256

To register anonymous comments:
Toll-free Hotline: **(877) 228-3331**

Bringing jobs,
clean energy and
opportunities to
San Luis Obispo
County



Mushrooms in the Garden

San Luis Obispo Botanical Garden will host a presentation on wild mushrooms on Saturday, February 11, from 1 to 2pm.

Join local photographer and mycologist Dennis Sheridan for a discussion on commonly seen mushrooms in our area, the role of mushrooms as decomposers, and the beneficial mycorrhizal fungi relationships mushrooms have with plants. Bring your questions and mushrooms for identification. This is a child (and adult) friendly talk, and there will be hands-on mushrooms to admire at the end of the talk, followed by a mushroom walk through the Garden.

Dennis Sheridan is a professional photographer and mycologist who has traveled worldwide and is published in many journals and textbooks. He graduated from Cal Poly Pomona in 1973 with a degree in biology, specializing in entomology. He moved to Morro Bay in 1974 and began a career in photography, concentrating on native wildlife, as well as fungi, lichens, insects, wildflowers and California scenery. He currently lives in Los Osos.

Dennis shares his enthusiasm for nature with students of all ages, and regularly teaches about nature and biology. He is dedicated to preserving the native habitat. He may be contacted at dennissher@sbcglobal.net.

Admission is \$5 for members/\$10 non-members. For more information, contact Kristina Van Wert at (805) 541-1400 ext 305 or volunteers@slobg.org.

Bike Month 2010 Image Design Competition

You can design the 2012 Bike Month logo

San Luis Obispo Regional Rideshare invites artists, designers and community members to submit works for the 3rd Annual Bike Month Image Design Competition.

Bike Month, a local celebration occurring annually each May, encourages the use of bicycle transportation through a variety of free community events. The winning design will act as a guiding force behind the 2012 Bike Month vision and bicycling festivities, encouraging San Luis Obispo County to spend more time in the bike lane and less time behind the steering wheel.

How the contest works:

The Image Design Competition is open to anyone interested in representing the new year of bicycle celebrations. The winning image/artwork will serve as the logo for Bike Month 2012 and be featured on all promotional collateral (posters, flyers, T-shirts) and advertisements. The creator of the winning image will be awarded \$300 for their design and offered a contract to complete the development of all other promotional materials.

Participants must submit their designs to Rideshare by **5 p.m., Friday, February 10th**. All eligible submissions will then be reviewed and the top five posted online at www.rideshare.org/bikemonth2012 for a public vote. Voting will remain active until 12 p.m., Monday, February 20th, and the winner announced Wednesday, February 22nd.

For more information on Bike Month and contest guidelines please visit www.rideshare.org/bikemonth2012.

SLO Regional Rideshare is dedicated to reducing the number of single occupant vehicles on San Luis Obispo's roads and highways, conserving fuel, reducing air pollution and making it easier for commuters to get to work or school. A division of the San Luis Obispo Council of Governments (SLOCOG), SLO Regional Rideshare shows employers the value of transportation benefits and customizes programs to meet a company's unique needs.



Thank You for Celebrating

Our Annual fund-raising Celebration of Environmental Literature, Music and Art at SLO's King David Masonic Temple was a smash. Attendees were held rapt by readings of two of our region's most distinguished authors, Vicki Leon and Catherine Ryan Hyde, the cello and guitar virtuosity of Barbara Lee and Andrew Healy, and a presentation on plein air painting by Douglas Stenhouse.

In addition to the incredible canvasses by Mr. Stenhouse and his fellow painters as highlighted in our January issue, which made the event a visual delight, we like to thank the businesses and individuals whose donations of goods and services made our silent auction and dinner a success – including the local wineries who kept spirits high by keeping the spirits flowing:

Apple Farm
Arcane Longboards
Art's Cyclery
Anam Cre' pottery studio
Cambria Bike Outfitters
Philip Christie
Chronic Cellars
Chumash Casino
Earth Mama Massage
EcoBambino
Edna Valley Winery
Cal & Letty French
From War to Peace
Full Spectrum – Evan Sylvester
Ashley Gibson
Brian & Chantal Hotovec
House of Bread

HumanKind Fair Trade
Starr Jenkins
LED Lite District
Vicki Leon
Paul McCloskey
Meridian Vineyards
Outspoken Coffee Shop
Johanna Rubba
SLO Veg.com
Splash Café
Stephen Ross Wine Cellars
Sweet Earth Chocolates
Trader Joe's
Whalebone Winery
Isaac Wollman
Zumer Sport

Swallows Getting Respect in Avila

by Shirley Goetz

After a series of unfortunate incidents at the Avila Beach Community Center and some intensive public education efforts by the Sierra Club and Audubon (see "Don't Mess with the Nests," June 2011), it looks like the word is out in Avila in favor of the cliff swallows!

Rather than knocking nests down during nesting season and risking fines for violating the federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act, people are responding during the seasonal down time and installing netting to deter swallows from building nests. Kudos to Avila Lighthouse Suites Resort for their installation of netting on their bell tower, and to an apartment complex on Laurel Lane, which graciously allowed the swallows to complete their nesting season and successfully raise their young before installing netting.

Elsewhere in town, however, the visible outlines of completed nests on the walls of homes are evidence that the swallows have repeatedly attempted to nest in an area and the homeowner has



Yay! Way to go, Avila Lighthouse Suites.

repeatedly failed to install preventive netting. I have been a witness to one resident, along with several friends, after dusk destroying a completed nest with live chicks inside. I will attempt to contact the homeowner with information on netting installation, swallows and the law.

Meanwhile, the SLO Food 4 Less continues to show us all the wrong way to do it. Birds find their way inside gaps in the netting, become trapped, and make a desperate and fatal attempt to escape, trying to force head and body through the tiny holes and ultimately starving or choking to death.



Nay! Not cool, Food 4 Less.



Taking the stage Vicki Leon prepares to read from "4000 Years of Uppity Women."

2012 Chapter Executive Committee Seated

The votes are in for our 2012 Chapter ExCom election. Welcome to Patrick McGibney and Lindi Doud, elected to 3-year terms, filling the seats of termed-out departing members Cal French and Steven Marx, who leave with our grateful thanks for their many years of service. Equal thanks to former Chapter chair Melody DeMeritt, who stepped down in January. Welcome to new Chair Greg McMillan. The ExCom will appoint a member to fill the currently vacant seventh seat.

PCBs

continued from page 5

followed in cleaning up the toxic spills by maintenance crews resulting from transformer leakage, a search of past PG&E repair orders of leaking or exploding transformers should be conducted, and perform testing and remedial actions of these past toxic spills.

The Redwood Chapter of the Sierra Club is asking the public to file a formal complaint of any past leaking or exploding pole mounted utility transformers near or at their homes or places of businesses, no matter how long ago, to the California Department of Toxic Substances Control website www.dtsc.ca.gov/database/CalEPA_Complaint.

Please keep alert and pass the word. The singing giants of the north seas deserve better.

My gripe is that the birds, after management sees they're trapped, are not released. I realize the netting is in place to prevent the birds from nesting or pooping on patrons of the store, but in the event of birds getting inside the netting, they are left to die and rot in the nets. They decompose, and bones and feathers fall through the netting onto the sidewalk.

I wish they would show more compassion and let the birds out. I have complained several times to the store management, but my complaints have fallen on deaf ears. Too sad.

Blunder

continued from page 8

Coastal Commission vote generally occurs only when new information has come to light that was not known to the applicant at the time of the original hearing, their request was denied.

Then the CCSD went rogue. In 2008, the District conducted ground-penetrating radar studies at Santa Rosa State Beach — “without necessary Coastal Development Permits or landowner approvals,” as noted by Coastal Commission staff — and transferred responsibility for the project to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

This maneuver took the project out of the Coastal Commission’s state permit jurisdiction, but the Commission could still render judgment on whether the project is consistent with California’s Coastal Management Program and the policies of the Coastal Act.

On December 9, in a unanimous

Commissioner Sanchez called the CCSD’s proposed project “a complete waste of public funds.”

vote, they determined that it’s not.

Commissioner Jana Zimmer said she was “concerned about the explanation the District gave; that we need this test data to see if this is going to be a feasible alternative to include in an environmental document. If I were spending the taxpayers’ money on a very expensive and important project, I’d be looking at whether the site is infeasible for environmental reasons from the get-go. So I think the thinking’s a little bit reversed.”

Commission Chair Mary Shallenberger took offense at the CCSD/Army Corps of Engineers switcheroo, which “really smells of going around the system.” Commissioner Steve Blank was alarmed at the precedent of other communities

potentially trying the same trick, and the prospect of the Army Corps marching up and down the coast with full-scale desalination plants, all suddenly outside of the Coastal Commission’s permitting authority and ability to protect the coast from the projects’ environmental impacts.

Commissioner Esther Sanchez took up the theme of the project as “a complete waste of public funds” and noted the “avoidance of proper procedure” to gain a permit.

The Commission having found the proposed project to be inconsistent with state coastal law, the Army Corps of Engineers may elect to proceed with the project regardless, at which point the Commission would have the option of either requesting mediation from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration or taking legal action.

The Cambria CSD has blazed a long, expensive trail of failure in its attempts to plow ahead with desalination as the solution to Cambria’s water woes. In view of that record, we look forward to the CCSD’s promised serious consideration of other options to maintain a secure water supply for Cambria.

As we pointed out in 2008 when the CCSD issued its draft Program Environmental Impact Report for Cambria’s Water Master Plan — which made no attempt at objectivity in exalting desal over all other water supply options — water recycling and local, smaller scale, less expensive, easier-to-permit projects could be designed to do the job.

The CCSD should also check out the 2009 report “Making Every Drop Work: Increasing Water Efficiency in California’s Commercial, Industrial and Institutional Sector,” available on line from the Natural Resources Defense Council.

To make this happen, however, we may have to change the Constitution, as we’ve done 27 times before. This time, we’d need to specify that corporations aren’t people, that money isn’t speech, and that it doesn’t abridge the First Amendment to tell people they can’t spend whatever they want getting elected. Winning a change like that would require hard political organizing, since big banks and big oil companies and big drug-makers will surely rally to protect their privilege.

Still, there’s a chance. The Occupy movement opened the door to this sort of change by reminding us all that the system is rigged, that its outcomes are unfair, that there’s reason to think people from across the political spectrum are tired of what we’ve got, and that getting angry and acting on that anger in the political arena is what being a citizen is all about.

It’s fertile ground for action. After all, Congress’s approval rating is now at 9%, which is another way of saying that everyone who’s not a lobbyist hates them and what they’re doing. The big boys are, of course, counting on us simmering down; they’re counting on us being cynical, on figuring there’s no hope or benefit in fighting city hall. But if we’re naïve enough to demand a country more like the one we were promised in high school civics class, then we have a shot.

A good time to take an initial stand comes later this month, when rallies outside every federal courthouse will mark the second anniversary of the Citizens United decision. That’s the one where the Supreme Court ruled that corporations had the right to spend whatever they wanted on campaigns.

To me, that decision was, in essence, corporate America saying, “We’re not going to bother pretending any more. This country belongs to us.”

We need to say, loud and clear: “Sorry. Time to give it back.”

Bill McKibben is Schumann Distinguished Scholar at Middlebury College, founder of the global climate campaign 350.org, a TomDispatch regular, and the author, most recently, of Eaarth: Making a Life on a Tough New Planet.

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Get Angry

continued from page 1

Boehner’s and McConnell’s payoffs would be upbraided by her editor for simpleminded journalism. That’s how the game is played and we’ve all bought into it, even if only to sputter in hopeless outrage.

Far from showing any shame, the big players boast about it: the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, front outfit for a consortium of corporations, has bragged on its website about outspending everyone in Washington, which is easy to do when Chevron, Goldman Sachs, and News Corp are writing you seven-figure checks. This really matters. The Chamber of Commerce spent more money on the 2010 elections than the Republican and Democratic National Committees combined, and 94% of those dollars went to climate-change deniers. That helps explain why the House voted last year to say that global warming isn’t real.

It also explains why “our” representatives vote, year in and year out, for billions of dollars worth of subsidies for fossil-fuel companies. If there was ever an industry that didn’t need subsidies, it would be this one: they make more money each year than any enterprise in the history of money. Not only that, but we’ve known how to burn coal for 300 years and oil for 200.

Those subsidies are simply payoffs. Companies give small gifts to legislators, and in return get large ones back, and we’re the ones who are actually paying.

Whose Money? Whose Washington?

I don’t want to be hopelessly naïve. I want to be hopefully naïve. It would be relatively easy to change this: you could provide public financing for campaigns instead of letting corporations pay. It’s the equivalent of having the National Football League hire referees instead of asking the teams to provide them.

Public financing of campaigns would cost a little money, but endlessly less than paying for the presents these guys give their masters. And it would let you watch what was happening in Washington without feeling as disgusted. Even legislators, once they got the hang of it, might enjoy neither raising money nor having to pretend it doesn’t affect them.

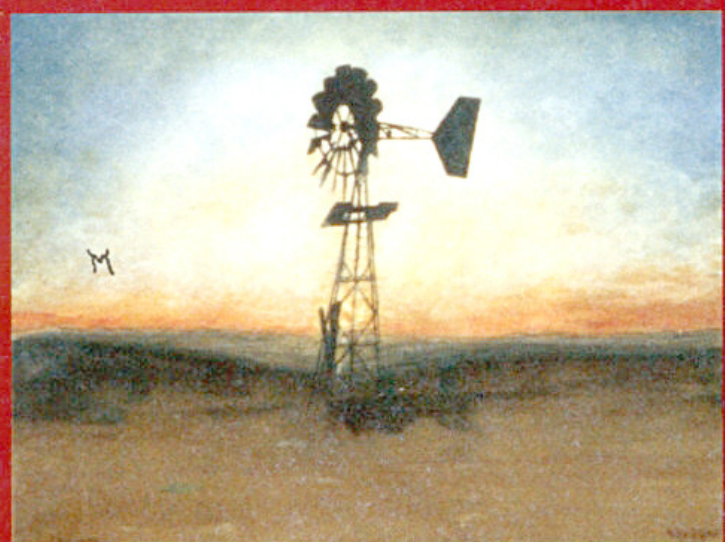
How high?

From the 2011 study, *The Last Drop: Climate Change and the Southwest Water Crisis*, by the *Stockholm Environment Institute*, Somerville, MA.

The technology for desalination exists and has been extensively tested in other countries, particularly in the Middle East. Unfortunately, desalination is expensive and energy-intensive, and disposal of salt wastes poses environmental concerns.

A 1997 State of California study contrasted the existing cost of water deliveries (\$195 to \$300 per acre foot) to the expected price of desalination (\$1,300 to \$2,200). In 2008, the nation’s first large-scale ocean desalination plant came on-line in Tampa Bay, Florida, generating 25 million gallons of freshwater every day. But the project was years behind schedule and many millions of dollars over budget, problems that also seem to be on the horizon for planned San Francisco/Marin County and San Diego desalination plants. Owners of the San Diego plant — still in the planning stages after more than a decade — have stated an intention to sell water for \$950 per acre foot (compared with \$700 per acre foot commonly paid by local agencies, according to the *Wall Street Journal*). Tampa Bay sells its desalinated water for \$1,100 per acre foot, but outside analyses have estimated the true costs of producing water at \$1,500 per acre foot for Tampa Bay, \$2,600 for San Diego, and \$2,700 for San Francisco/Marin County. Prices this high call into question the affordability of desalination in comparison to other methods of balancing the Southwest’s water use with its water supply.

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USE IN AND FOR GOOD HEALTH

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Chapter of the Sierra Club and the Surfrider Foundation, available for \$10 postage paid, while supplies last. Mail your check to Sierra Club, P.O. Box 15755, SLO 93406.

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Outings and Activities Calendar

Seller of travel registration information: CST 2087766-40. Registration as a seller of travel does not constitute approval by the State of California.

All our hikes and activities are open to all Club members and the general public. Please bring drinking water to all outings and optionally a lunch. Sturdy footwear is recommended. All phone numbers listed are within area code 805 unless otherwise noted. Pets are generally not allowed. A parent or responsible adult must accompany children under the age of 18. If you have any suggestions for hikes or outdoor activities, questions about the Chapter's outing policies, or would like to be an outings leader, call Outings Chair Joe Morris, 772-1875. For information on a specific outing, please call the listed outing leader.

Sat., Feb. 4th, 9 a.m. Southern Big Sur Coastal Hike Exploring the Silver Peak Wilderness. Explore Villa Creek and Alder Creek Drainage on 9-mile moderately strenuous hike with 2,400 foot elevation gain and loss. We will start out on the Cruikshank Trail to Upper Cruikshank Camp, head north on Buckeye Trail crossing Villa Creek, then climb to the ridge top above Alder Creek for a wonderful view and lunch. We expect to see early spring flowers. Bring lunch, water, non-slip hiking shoes and be prepared for varying weather conditions. Meet at the Washburn Day Use Area, San Simeon State Park about 1.5 mile north of Cambria. SLO carpoolers leave from Santa Rosa Park at 8:10 a.m. Info.: Gary at (805)473-3694. Rain or threat of rain cancels.

Sat., Feb. 11th, 9 a.m., West Cuesta Ridge Hike. Hike to top of West Cuesta Ridge from Stenner Creek. Ascent follows Shooters trail, traverses ridge to Sargent Cypress Botanical Area, then down along Morning Glory trail to starting point. This is a moderately strenuous 8-mile hike, with 2000-foot elevation gain. Meet at the Cal Poly Ropes Course Parking Area, about 2 miles up Stenner Creek Road, off Hwy 1, about a mile from Foothill Blvd (going towards Morro Bay). Bring adequate water, snacks, and dress in layers for the weather. Hat and sturdy shoes are advised. Info: Bill at (805) 459-2103, bill.waycott@gmail.com. The plants, animals, and the geology of the area will be topics during the hike. Rain cancels.

Sat., Feb. 11th, 10 a.m. Guadalupe Beach Hike. Walk down a pristine beach, learning about its history and adapted vegetation,

then past historic dunes to Mussel Rock. 5 1/2-mile round trip, duration about 3 hours. Bring water, picnic lunch, windbreaker, and hat. Optional lunch afterwards at restaurant in quaint, historic Guadalupe. Take Main St. (Guadalupe) exit off Hwy 101, continuing on West Main St. through park to road end. Rain cancels. Info.: Andrea Ortiz, 934-2792. Asst.: Joe Morris.

Sun. Feb. 12th, 10 a.m. Johnson Ranch. PoleCats is dedicated to leading local Sierra Club day hikes and modeling the benefits of using trekking poles. Hike is 2.2 miles/150 feet elevation change. Trailhead located just after Lower Higuera goes under Highway 101 and becomes Ontario Road. Confirm with David Georgi at 458-5575 or polecatleader@gmail.com for upcoming activities. Biped welcome.

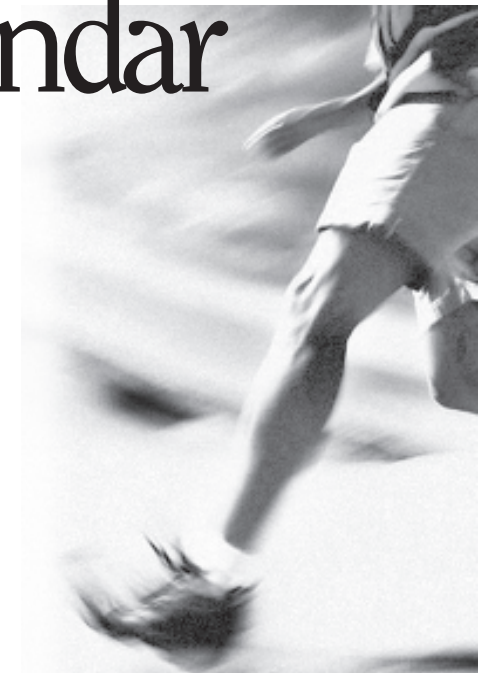
Sun. Feb. 12th, 1 p.m. Guided Walk of Mission-Era San Luis Obispo. Do you know where SLO's first doctor lived, the location of the "hanging tree," or the building that may be the oldest in the state? Find out and much more on an easy

stroll past the Mission, adobes, and old Chinatown. Hear stories of the early days of SLO, the Chumash, and its Gold-Rush pioneers, famous and infamous. Families welcome. Meet at NW corner of Monterey and Osos Sts. Leader: Joe Morris, 772-1875.

Sat-Mon, Feb 18th-20th - Explore and Serve in the Grass Valley Wilderness. Slightly east and south of Ridgecrest, CA, the Grass Valley Wilderness was created in 1994. It features rolling hills and a few higher rock outcroppings. As it is no longer available for grazing, we will join a group of college age SCA interns in removing old fence poles and disguising an illegal road. Saturday and Sunday are for work, and Monday, President's Day, will be reserved to hike and explore the Wilderness. This

is an opportunity to combine carcamping, dayhiking, exploring, and service in a relatively unknown wilderness. Leader: Craig Deutsche, 310-477-6670, craig.deutsche@gmail.com. CNRCC Desert Committee.

Sat., Feb. 25th, 10 a.m. Architecture's Graveyard, Cal Poly. Easy, 2-mile



This is a partial listing of Outings offered by our chapter. Please check the web page www.santalucia.sierraclub.org for the most up-to-date listing of activities.

roundtrip hike into scenic Cal Poly Canyon to explore the creative structures built by past students, duration about 1 1/2 hrs. Meet at H4 Parking lot, corner of N. Perimeter Rd. and Village Dr. Bring water, sturdy shoes, and dress in layers for the weather. Rain or threat of rain cancels. Info: Stuart Weickgenant, 760-519-8080 Asst.: Joe Morris.

Sun. Feb. 26th, 10 a.m., Islay Hill Open Space. PoleCats is dedicated to leading local Sierra Club day hikes and modeling the benefits of using trekking poles — 1 mile/400 feet elevation change. Join us for a hike with spectacular views of Edna Valley to the south and morros to the north. From Broad, go east on Tank Farm, turn right on Wavertree, left on Spanish Oaks and veer right onto Sweetbay and park near cul-de-sac. Confirm with David Georgi at 458-5575 or polecatleader@gmail.com for upcoming activities. Biped welcome.

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Outings Sponsored by other organizations

Sweet Springs Nature Preserve. The Audubon Society, which manages Sweet Springs Nature Preserve in Los Osos, needs volunteers on the second Saturday of the month from 9-12 a.m. to help with watering, weeding, planting, etc. Info at www.morro.coastaudubon.org.

Ventana Wilderness Alliance Trail Crew Opportunities

Volunteers are needed for work in the Ventana and Silverpeak Wilderness Wilderness Areas. Trail crew leader daveknapp@ventanawild.org.

