SANTA LUCIAN

SIERRA CLUB
EXPLORE, ENJOY, AND PROTECT THE PLANET

Santa Lucia Chapter

Nov./Dec. 2026
Volume 63 No. 6

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

In Memoriam: Pat Veesart



The Sierra Club's legendary executive director, David Brower, said "compromise is often necessary but it ought not originate with the Sierra Club." In the history of the Club, few activists have embodied that creed as fully as Pat Veesart, who passed away on Sept. 10 at his home on Goodwin Ranch in the Carrizo Plain National Monnument. Anyone who knew him will never forget him. Pat was one of those people whose life and works and personality were too expansive to be fully captured in words. But we do have his own words, set down in 2014 as part of a Santa Lucian series profiling chapter activists, excerpted below. For those who didn't know him, they provide some idea of the measure of the man.

How and why did you come to be a Sierra Club chapter leader?

Back in the '90s I was involved with an activist group called the Alternative Transportation Task Force (ATTF) that was advocating for bike lanes in San Luis Obispo City and County, better transit service and more livable neighborhoods. Our group was quite active and, ultimately, quite successful. The Santa Lucia Chapter was an ally in our efforts. The Chapter Chair at the time, Gary Felsman, offered to bring our group under the Sierra Club umbrella and we agreed. Suddenly we were Sierra Club activists; part of a larger agenda and with access to the Club's support and resources. It made a big difference. Eventually I ended up on the Executive Committee of the local chapter, served some time as Chapter Chair, and was hired by the Club to work on a Sierra Club independent expenditure campaign to defeat Andrea Seastrand and get Walter Capps elected to Congress. I also worked for the Club in Alaska as an organizer on forest issues and in Sacramento where I was the Chapter Liaison for Sierra Club California – connecting California's 13 chapters with the State organization. The national Sierra Club organization is like a huge battleship – not especially nimble, but capable of delivering awesome firepower once you go through all the maneuvers to get it into position. The day-to-day work of the Club – work on local issues that people feel most passionately about – occurs at the chapter level.

What do you think have been the high points for conservation and enlightened land use in SLO County?

Sadly, I don't think that "enlightened land use" has come to San Luis Obispo County yet. We put good language into plans, but often fall short of actually implementing good policies. We continue to elect people who value expediency and making nice over actual conservation. Citizens are more engaged with their gadgets than they are with the decisions being made that affect our incredible county. And really, it is generous to call people "citizens" if they are not at least somewhat engaged. Inexorably, we are following the path that so many California counties have trod before us. I will say that we have, through the efforts of citizens in this county, managed to create a pretty good General Plan with progressive land-use policies.

Do you have a favorite place in nature you love to visit?

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I have lived in SLO County for 43 years and I am still belly-ache in love with the region. We are so close to incredible wilderness, spectacular coastline, valley grasslands, oak woodlands, rivers and lakes, amazing biological, geological, archeological resources…I feel like a hungry man at an incredible banquet – I almost don't know where to start. I love the Big Sur coast and the Ventana Wilderness; the Arroyo Seco is one of my favorite places in California. I love the Santa Barbara back country; the Los Padres National Forest. I love the Carrizo Plain; the San Emigdio Mountains; the southern Sierra and the southern San Joaquin Valley. The coast at San Simeon; Montana de Oro; the Oceano/ Guadalupe Dunes complex; Point Sal... the list goes on and on and I'm still within 100 miles of San Luis Obispo!

How do you recommend people get involved?

Show up! Pay attention! Tell the truth! Don't be attached to the outcome. Showing up really matters. You can sit around and gripe about that which you do not like, or you can get off your duff and go to a city council meeting or the Board of Supervisors or get involved with some local NGO and start trying to change what you do not like. One path leads to impotence and one path leads to power. Oh, you'll lose quite often but you will at least hold the people who are doing the things you don't like accountable and you will lessen and slow their impact. They'd love it if you would just stay glued to your gadgets and leave the governing to them. If the siren call of gadgets is too strong, then send money. Get involved and you will meet the very best people and your life will be better for it.

What's your vision for the future of the Chapter and our piece of California?

I assume our members know what an amazing chapter we have. When I worked for Sierra Club California I had regular contact with all 13 Sierra Club chapters in California, and the Santa Lucia Chapter is at the top of the heap. We are not the biggest, nor the best funded, but we do an incredible amount of good work for such a small chapter and we get it right most of the time. We are often on the cutting edge of what is happening in California and we are in a position to (and we do) influence the work of the other chapters and the national organization…. As for the future of the county, I feel strongly that we are in for some rough seas – right here and in California, and nationally and globally. If there was ever a time when we should be thinking about conserving our water sources, our food supply and our ability to produce energy locally, this is it. If there was ever a time when we should be coming together and working together as citizens of this county, this is it. When a crisis occurs, whatever that crisis happens to be, it will be our ability to take care of ourselves and each other that will make the difference.

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*The **Santa Lucian** is published bimonthly, Jan-Nov. Articles, environmental information and letters to the editor are welcome.The deadline for each issue is the 20th day of the prior month. Send to:* sierraclub8 @gmail.com

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SANTA LUCIA

Printed by Poor Richard's Press, San Luis Obispo

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The **Executive Committee** meets the second to last Monday of each month at 5:30 p.m. via Zoom. All members are welcome to attend.

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Vote for your Sierra Club Chapter's Executive Committee for 2027

It's the annual Santa Lucia Chapter Executive Committee election, the Chapter's policy-makers. You may vote for up to three candidates. Santa Lucia Chapter members as of Nov. 6, 2026, are eligible to vote. You can vote online via MyAccount or by mail (instructions below). Candidate bios are abridged; full bios are availble online.

Kala Babu

I teach Federal Environmental Law at Cal Poly with the hope of molding the next generation of environmental change-makers.

As a Conservation Committee member, I've learned how much impact our chapter can have locally and statewide.

My experience as a water justice lawyer in the Central Valley taught me how to merge those skills with legal advocacy and community building. I can offer the passion and commitment to protect our wild places; experience in community organizing and coalition building; and the ability to break down complex environmental issues.



Carole Mintzer

I am an active volunteer with the Santa Lucia Chapter's Climate and Clean Energy Committee and Communications Team. From 2020 through 2023, I Chaired the Executive Committee.

I began volunteering with the Sierra Club in 1998 in Orange County, where I chaired the Angeles Chapter Executive Committee.

To make progress on our environmental work in SLO County, we need strong leadership that supports our staff and volunteers. I look forward to nurturing the next generation of volunteers and activists to protect the environment we hold dear.



Madeline Schechter

I fell in love with nature from an early age. This led me to major in Environmental Management & Protection at Cal Poly and to interning with organizations giving outdoor experiences to children, such as Learning Among the Oaks and the Guadalupe Dunes Center. This led to my career in environmental education, working for One Cool Earth as a garden educator. We build and maintain gardens as living laboratories on public school campuses to teach environmental science.

I have served on the Executive Committee for the past year, and would be honored to serve again.



Nia Starr

I hold a Master of Science in Sustainable Environmental Systems and am a LEED Green Associate. I work at the Environmental Center of San Luis Obispo, overseeing the SLO County Green Business Program.

I spent nearly a decade as a visual designer, an experience that continues to shape how I use storytelling and communication to connect people with complex environmental issues. During my time in New York, I became interested in environmental advocacy and am excited to continue that work on the Central Coast through my involvement with the Sierra Club.



2027 Santa Lucia Chapter Executive Committee Ballot

To vote, you need your 6 to 8-digit Member ID number. It is on this newsletter's address label and the label of your Sierra magazine issues. If you need help, contact the Sierra Club membership office at member.care@sierraclub.org or 415-977-5653.

To vote online (preferred): You need to access your Sierra Club MyAccount. If you haven't set up MyAccount, go to myaccount.sierraclub.org. Once you set up MyAccount or if you already have MyAccount vote at sc.org/VoterPortal and log in to MyAccount from this page.

To vote by mail: Mark the box for up to three candidates. Ballots with more than three votes will not be counted. Your mailing label indicates whether you have a JOINT or SINGLE membership. Joint members, please use both check boxes to vote. Sign and date the envelope flap. Do not write your name on the ballot. Mail to Elections Committee, Santa Lucia Chapter, P.O. Box 15755, San Luis Obispo, CA 93406. All ballots must be received midnight on Tuesday, December 8. If both mailed and online ballots are received with the same Member ID, only the final online ballot counts.

☐ **Nia Starr** ☐ **Madeline Schechter**

☐ **Carole Mintzer** ☐ **Kala Babu**

_____

member ID

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County leaders, at all levels, should be doing all they can to make us as self-sustaining as possible. The good news is that there is a lot of awareness and a lot of movement in the right direction here in SLO County. We are blessed with many advantages and with incredible natural and human resources. My fervent hope for the future is that people will focus more on how much we all have in common and less on our differences.

Thank You Monthly Donors!!!

During this time of giving thanks, we want to make a special thank you to our monthly donors. Your ongoing support of the Santa Lucia Chapter provides a secure foundation for our advocacy to protect the Central Coast. As we monitor and call for action on local environmental issues, it's reassuring to know you are there to sustain our efforts.

Do you want to see your name here next year? Go to our website and sign up to be a monthly donor. It's an easy and much appreciated way to support the Chapter, and all your donations stay here in San Luis Obispo County. Sign-up & more info at: sc.org/SLDonate

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The rest of the newsletter is online!

You're receiving this print edition so we can deliver your 2026 Executive Committee ballot. The rest of the Nov/Dec issue is on our website, as usual:
Sierraclub.org/santa-lucia/santa-lucian-newsletter

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sc.org/SantaLuciaNews

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