

Sierra Club YODELER

THE NEWSPAPER OF THE SAN FRANCISCO BAY CHAPTER ♦ SPRING 2021

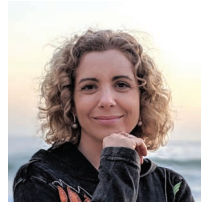


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LETTER FROM THE CHAIR

Dear friends,

We are entering this year with emotions ranging from deep, aching loss and fatigue to elation and anticipation of renewal and unprecedented opportunities to create the world we want.



Some of us experienced untimely losses that we did not feel prepared for. We met challenges that could break our sense of humanity and bring us to tears.

Despite my personal losses, I choose to reflect on the things, experiences, and most importantly, people and beings, who kept me strong, honest, and in service. 2020 was legitimately an unprecedented year, and without throwing myself into volunteer work with my Sierra Club colleagues and friends, I am not sure where my psyche would be.

This year, I am looking forward – not to returning to “normalcy” characterized by the horrific denial of the needs of our fellow humans, but to co-creating the new normal of care, decency, equality, justice, awareness, and kindness to all our human brothers and sisters and to all our planet's inhabitants.

I hope that despite all the trying experiences of the past year you are finding the beauty, joy, and miracle of life and all of its expressions.

As we chart our course ahead, I encourage you to please join in protecting our beautiful planet for all by volunteering with the Sierra Club and/or donating to our local SF Bay Chapter. You'll find many opportunities for both in the pages of this Yodeler. Thank you!

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Olga A. Bolotina". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a horizontal line underneath.

Olga A. Bolotina
CHAPTER CHAIR

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Ruby-crowned kinglet
by Michael Reinhart



SPRING 2021 CHAPTER NEWS

Community outings still on hold

To keep our community safe during this ongoing pandemic the Sierra Club isn't currently hosting outings, but we hope that isn't stopping you from getting outside safely on your own or with your 'quarantine pod.' We know that time spent in nature lowers anxiety and helps us cope with pent-up stress. We hope to be offering outings again soon — check sierraclub.org/sfbay/events for updates.

Stay up to date with our YouTube channel!

Our YouTube channel is the perfect place to catch up on our virtual events. All of our Green Friday presentations are recorded and uploaded onto our channel, with recent speakers including Ken Brower, Dr. Hari Lamba, and Extinction Rebellion. If you missed one of our Facebook livestreams of Olga Bolotina's In the Know interview series, you can catch up with our "In the Know" YouTube playlist featuring latest guests Joanne Drabek, Sophie Hahn, and Chris Applegate. To watch, head to bit.ly/SFBayYouTube.

Welcome to our new Communications Assistant, Elizabeth Hall!

The Chapter is happy to welcome a new Communications Assistant, Elizabeth Hall. Elizabeth comes to the Sierra Club with a background in environmental science and digital media. She recently graduated from Vanderbilt University with a degree in Ecology, Evolution, and Organismal Biology and is now back home in the Bay Area, based in her hometown of Palo Alto. Elizabeth also has a

huge passion for theatre, and currently works part-time at Magic Theatre in San Francisco.

Saying goodbye to our office space

Due to the COVID-19 work-from-home orders coinciding with the end of the lease on the chapter's office space, we have let go of our longtime home at 2530 San Pablo Avenue in Berkeley. We sorely miss drop-ins from members and sharing a building with our wonderful neighbors including the Ecology Center and Golden Gate Audobon Society. When it's safe to be together in person once again, we will look for a new home base to host our meetings, workspaces, trainings, and parties.

For now, our new mailing address is: P.O. Box 2663, Berkeley, CA 94702. You can still call 510-848-0800 to reach staff during the regular workday and leave voicemails.

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OUT WITH THE OLD, IN WITH THE NEW

Make 2021 your best year ever by starting it off with a vehicle donation to the Sierra Club Foundation's SF Bay Chapter! It's easy, the pick-up is free, and cars, boats, motorcycles, RVs and more are all tax-deductible. To learn more, visit our website at scfch.careasy.org or call 844-674-3772.

Learn the Basics of Backcountry Travel: Virtual Beginner's Backpack Course This Spring

THOMAS MEISSNER

Learn how to travel safely and comfortably with only a pack on your back through the annual Beginner's Backpack course run by the Backpack Section. We are offering this opportunity for folks who have little or no experience in backpacking but want to explore backcountry trails and get away from the crowds.

As the Sierra Club's in-person outings are suspended, we are holding this year's class virtually via Zoom on three evenings, **March 31st, April 7th, and April 14th from 6:30 to 8:30 PM**. Experienced Backpack Section leaders will present the topics as slideshows or videos. There is time allocated for participants to ask questions. Once in-person outings have started again, the Backpack Section plans to



offer two-day overnight field trips for course participants.

For more details on what will be covered throughout the course, check out our blog post at bit.ly/backpackcourse.

The suggested donation to the Backpack Section is \$20. It covers all three classes and online access to the course material.

Please R.S.V.P. though the SF Bay Chapter Activities and Events Calendar at sierraclub.org/sfbay/events. For questions or more information, contact Backpacking Section Chair Thomas Meissner at meissner.thomas@sbcglobal.net.

Virtual Green Friday Program Continues This Spring

ELIZABETH DODGE

The Green Friday speaker series is beaming straight into your home via Zoom! Join us virtually on the second Friday of each month for presentations on some of the most interesting and important environmental issues of our time. "Doors" open at 7:00 PM and the presentations begin at 7:30 PM. Read more and register (free) via the calendar listings at sierraclub.org/sfbay/events and we'll send you instructions for how to join via Zoom.

On March 12th, Greg Karras, author of "Decommissioning California Refineries: Climate and Health Paths in an Oil State" will share his expertise on pathways that could be taken in California to identify the most feasible paths for climate and health protection, focusing on oil—the most entrenched fossil fuel in this state.

On April 9th, SAVE THE FROGS! founder Dr. Kerry Kriger will host an enlightening discussion on amphibian conservation in the 21st century. Learn about the nat-

ural history of amphibians; the threats they face; and ways SAVE THE FROGS! protects amphibians and empowers ordinary citizens to make extraordinary contributions to the betterment of the planet.

On May 14th, Laura Cunningham, scientist, artist, and conservation advocate, will show us what San Francisco, Oakland, and Berkeley looked like 500 years ago. Join us on a tour of the historical ecology of California based on 30 years of research about the landscapes, wildlife, and indigenous management of California before European contact.

Do you have ideas for future Green Friday programs? Reach out to program coordinator Elizabeth Dodge at lizdodge@icloud.com.



The Chevron Oil Spill Reminds Us Why We Need a Just Transition

JACOB KLEIN

On February 10th, a leak in one of the pipelines operated by the Chevron Richmond Refinery spilled around 600 gallons of oil into the waters of the San Francisco Bay near Richmond and San Pablo. The pipeline leaked a petroleum and water mixture at a rate of five gallons per minute for about two hours, leaving an oily sheen four miles long. Emergency responders were dispatched to resolve the crisis, and a health advisory was issued calling for locals with "respiratory sensitivities" to stay indoors.

This is one more example of how fossil fuel companies continue to negatively impact the health and safety of front-line communities and damage sensitive ecosystems. Impacted communities reported a strong smell and respiratory difficulty near the spill site. These are the same communities already dealing with toxic emissions from the refinery itself. People were also warned to avoid the water due to its contaminated nature. Although no animals appear to have been impacted by the oil, there's some concern for local eelgrass beds and other Bay habitats.

These kinds of crises should not be tolerated and require accountability from their actors. On February 16th, the Richmond City Council heard two items related to holding Chevron accountable. One was a resolution in support of a recommendation to the Bay Area Air Quality Management District (BAAQMD) for the strongest health and safety regulations possible for refineries' Fluidized Catalytic Cracking Units. These "cat crackers" are systems that are used to break down heavy crude oil into usable fuels, and which release hazardous emissions in the process. The second item on the Council's agenda called on several agencies to present reports on the oil spill and possible impacts that may arise from it.

Actions like these are important steps to support communities impacted by fossil fuels, but there is much more to be done. Environmental justice groups like Communities

for a Better Environment and Asian Pacific Environmental Network are calling for a transition away from fossil fuels to truly sustainable energy sources. That shift, along with site remediation, support for the communities long hurt by fossil fuels production, and development of well-paying green jobs, is known as a "just transition." We must look to these groups for their leadership on this issue as they've experienced it firsthand for decades.

On the statewide level, the concept of just transitions is starting to get more and more traction. In last year's Executive Order, Governor Newsom issued a mandate to the Office of Planning and Research (OPR) to develop a roadmap for the state on just transitions. That process will begin soon, with a public process looking to begin this spring and the roadmap slated to be released this summer. It remains to be seen how this will unfold and what manner of roadmap document will be released.

Other possibilities for moving statewide just transitions have appeared in the state legislature. State Senators Scott Weiner and Monique Limón introduced a bill, SB 467, which would ban harmful oil extraction methods. It also includes language about supporting impacted workers who may lose jobs. Meanwhile, Assemblymember Al Muratsuchi introduced AB 1453 that calls for establishing



a Just Transition Advisory Commission to develop and adopt a process for a Just Transition plan.

Making our voices heard on these issues is essential to ensuring a transformative and equitable transition. With that in mind, Sierra Club signed on with 80 other environmental, community, faith-based, parent, and business groups in a letter to the OPR, largely focused on process and public participation. In order to have a holistic just transition plan, there must be stakeholder presence, particularly of those most impacted. While we want a seat at the table for environmental groups, we also demand seats for labor representatives and environmental justice communities who are often communities of color facing the worst of environmental racism. It's essential that we listen and center those concerns as we move forward for a just transition.

Jacob Klein is an organizer for the SF Bay Chapter.

When It Comes to the SF Bay Shoreline, We're All in This Together

JULIA FOOTE

On a gray Friday morning in November 2019 (back in those glorious pre-pandemic days), a staffer from Greenbelt Alliance and I were scooped up from the Fremont BART station by two advocates from Citizens Committee to Complete the Refuge. We had an early meeting with the Mayor and City Manager of Newark to discuss a proposed luxury housing development on a restorable wetland along the San Francisco Bay shoreline at Newark's "Area 4" site. The 469-unit luxury housing project in question would pave over hundreds of acres of open space directly adjacent to the Don Edwards SF Bay National Wildlife Refuge. 100,000 truckloads of fill would be dumped atop restorable wetlands within a 100-year FEMA flood zone that is anticipated to be completely inundated by sea level rise. There is no universe in which this project makes sense; but for profit-hungry developers and city government, we

have to be convincing.

The case for protecting Area 4 is clear. This 559-acre site of historic SF Bay wetlands has been identified as a key opportunity for nature-based adaptation for sea level rise — as a rare space for wetlands to migrate upland, providing critical habitat for endangered wildlife and flood protection for the community in the decades to come.

However, something deeply troubling happened while making our case that day in November. Unexpectedly and unironically, we had to define the terms "wetland," "ecosystem," and "ecosystem services" to the Mayor and City Manager so that they could follow our argument. I walked out of that meeting appalled that people who did not have the knowledge to understand the consequences of their actions would be able to make such permanent, destructive decisions.

One month later, the City of Newark approved the development. I felt the familiar sting of environmental advocates, frontline communities, and members of my generation not being heard; all for short-term gains for people who don't care to understand what they destroy and what future they create.

Legal efforts by environmentalists to challenge the environmental review of the Area 4 development so far



have been unsuccessful. Now we are pressuring the Bay Conservation and Development Commission (BCDC) and the SF Bay Regional Water Quality Control Board, agencies responsible for protecting the Bay, to step in and exert the full extent of their regulatory authority to protect Area 4.

The Newark Area 4 issue is a clear example of why we need regional collaboration to address rising seas. Much of the responsibility to adapt to rising sea level currently lies at the city or county level, but local initiatives to adapt to sea level rise will not be enough to solve a regional problem.

Moreover, in a closed Bay system, anything that happens on one part of the shoreline impacts the whole shoreline, so local actions can cause unintended flood impacts to neighboring cities. A localized approach would likely cause disproportionate impacts to under-resourced communities as they struggle to mitigate and adapt to the impact of sea level rise on jobs, businesses, and homes. Without regional collaboration we could see near-term loss of wetlands — the ecosystems most at risk of flooding. Localities will also be more likely to delay addressing sea level rise due to pressing concerns like housing and transportation with a lack of incentive to work across jurisdictions for multi-benefit, nature-based solutions.

BCDC has responded to this issue with Bay Adapt, “an initiative to establish regional agreement on the actions necessary to protect people and the natural and built environment from rising sea levels.” Alongside a wide variety of agencies and stakeholders, the Sierra Club is engaging in Bay Adapt to identify, deliberate, and commit to a set of shared actions in a “Joint Platform” that aims for the Bay Area to adapt better and faster to a rising Bay.

At this stage in the Bay Adapt process, the Sierra Club’s Three-Chapter Sea Level Rise Committee is giving feedback on the Draft Joint Platform of 15 Actions that was released to stakeholders in the fall. Our comments call for:

- Emphasizing the preservation of the ecological health of the Bay in the same way that the platform addresses the needs of shoreline communities and infrastructure.
- Participation of climate scientists, environmental scientists, and biologists in implementing the Bay Adapt platform.
- The protection and enhancement of biological resources to be included in the performance metrics

that measure success towards regional goals.

- Initiatives to educate local leaders and government officials about the ecological health of the Bay, and how their land use decisions impact the health of the Bay.
- A regional permitting system that considers regional cumulative impacts in adaptation planning and prioritizes permitting for nature based projects with significant environmental benefits and wetland restoration.
- Meaningful involvement of environmental advocates, community based organizations, and environmental justice organizations.

We expect BCDC to hold a public forum on this platform in the coming months and we will need advocates for these asks on our side! Please reach out to SF Bay Chapter organizer Julia Foote at julia.foote@sierraclub.org if you’re interested in being an advocate with us on this regionally significant process for a healthy Bay ecosystem.



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MATT BIELBY
matt.bielby@sierraclub.org
 510-848-0800 x 321

Keeping Tabs as Refineries Press on With Transitions

JACOB KLEIN

Phillips 66 is moving forward with plans to transition its Rodeo refinery from crude oil processing to renewable diesel, renewable gasoline, and sustainable jet fuel. Late in December, the company submitted a Notice of Preparation to Contra Costa County for the planned project, which they've branded Rodeo Renewed.

A Notice of Preparation (NOP) is the prelude to producing an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) as mandated by the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). It notifies the lead agency, in this case Contra Costa County, about the project and also invites community participation through public comments. NOPs are particularly important for community groups and environmental organizations because they allow us an opportunity to demand the EIR take into account the issues that we think need to be addressed: in this case, local emissions, feedstock sourcing, and job security for refinery workers, among others. Through a process called scoping, we can outline all the aspects we believe need to be answered for a complete EIR.

This is not an exceptional process, but the way that Phillips 66 has undertaken it is startling. The NOP was announced on December 21st, 2020, right before most people checked out for the holidays. The comment deadline was January 27th, 2021. Considering how unprecedented this project is and how complicated the technical aspects are, this didn't allow much time for individuals to review the NOP and associated documents in order to submit comments that are as detailed as they could be.



Nonetheless, the Chapter signed on to a letter enumerating as many areas of further exploration as could be identified.

Marathon Oil is also moving forward with the transition of its Martinez oil refinery to renewable diesel refining, posting its NOP on February 17th, 2021. A scoping meeting will be held on March 15th, at which the Contra Costa County Department of Conservation and Development will hear public comments on what should be considered for the Draft EIR. Public comments on the scoping process must be submitted by Monday, March 22.

While the Draft EIR for Phillips 66 isn't expected until the end of 2021 or even early 2022, Marathon is hoping to have its permit in place — necessitating the full CEQA process to have been completed — by this summer.

Marathon has been meeting with various organizations and groups, including Sierra Club, to learn about areas of concern. This outreach will supplement, but not substitute, the CEQA process. Phillips 66, on the other hand, has not reached out to Sierra Club for a meeting — though this may have to do with the fact that we're on opposite sides of litigation over the Richmond coal ordinance.

Much remains to be seen about the so-called renewability and sustainability of the fuels Phillips 66 and Marathon are proposing — questions that we and other environmental groups are still figuring out. One area of particular concern is feedstock. Although both companies tout their planned usage of used cooking oils, grease, and rendered fats as repurposing waste products, more and more it looks as if there may not be enough viable sources to make up the proposed production quantities. Therefore, soy oil (or other agriculturally tendered oils) will likely make up the bulk of the feedstock, begging questions about current availability, market chain displacement, monoculture agriculture, and possible deforestation — especially when foreign markets are brought into the mix. There are some who claim that these possible consequences of the transition will outweigh the potential of immediate greenhouse gas emission reductions from the refineries themselves.

As we plan for a carbon-free future, we must be judicious in considering our options while also holding firm. Certainly, transitions will be complicated and there may be compromises we'll have to make our peace with. However, to support communities who have been impacted by the toxicity of petroleum-based fuels, and to fend off continued climate crisis, we must also be ready to push ourselves out of comfort zones and into spaces of radical imagining.

Jacob Klein is an organizer for the SF Bay Chapter.

The SkyStar Observation Wheel Should Close to Protect Our Wildlife

KATHERINE HOWARD

Last year, without adequate environmental review, the San Francisco Recreation and Park Department installed a brightly lit Ferris wheel in the middle of Golden Gate Park. Because of the non-historic character of the wheel, the Historic Preservation Commission limited the wheel's permit to one year. Now the Recreation and Park Department is asking that this permit be extended for four more years.

Here's why this is a problem for the environment:

The SkyStar Observation Wheel has bands of exterior booth lights and flashing, rotating designs on the sides — all extremely bright LEDs — that stay lit until 10:00 PM every night. The wheel is brighter than any other lighted object in the western part of San Francisco, allowing it to be seen from more than a mile away.

Our city parks are a vital refuge for wild animals struggling to deal with the loss of habitat and open space. Wildlife needs darkness. Light pollution can have a negative impact on birds — both resident and migrating — as well as bats, insects, amphibians, and other animals. Artificial light can alter an animal's circadian rhythm, disrupting breeding, foraging, and sheltering cycles. Furthermore, it can draw and disorient some species while repelling others — in both cases, to deadly effect.

Golden Gate Park is one of the few places in San Francisco where wildlife can find refuge at night. And yet, the Recreation and Park Department has chosen to light the center of one of San Francisco's major habitat areas with extremely bright LEDs, which have remained lit every night, even as the wheel remains closed to the public due to COVID restrictions.

Since its inception, Golden Gate Park has provided the opportunity for families and children from all income levels to enjoy nature close to home; this is especially important for those who do not have easy access to natural areas outside the city. If our own local nature is continuously infringed upon by artificial attractions — particularly those which harm wildlife — then that deprives those communities of a direct experience with nature.

The wheel was installed by the Recreation and Park Department as an attraction that would bring people into Golden Gate Park during its 150th Anniversary Celebration. Howev-



er, throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the people of San Francisco have flocked to Golden Gate Park to enjoy it for its primary historic use: as a parkland. A better celebration of the Park would be providing nature tours, educational events, and opportunities for children to learn about the importance of protecting nature in the fight against climate change.

Here is the status of the wheel as of this writing:

- Four members of the San Francisco Board of Supervisors have asked to meet with the Rec and Park Department to discuss the public's concerns.
- The Sierra Club has filed a CEQA appeal of the Environmental Determination regarding the four-year extension.
- There is new controversy surrounding the Ferris wheel. As we are going to press, members of the Board of Supervisors have requested an investigation into the park's 150th Anniversary celebration agreement between the nonprofit San Francisco Parks Alliance and the Rec and Park Department. The Park Alliance gets \$1 for every \$18 Ferris wheel ticket sold.

You can speak up for wildlife by sending a message to the San Francisco Historic Preservation Commission, the Recreation and Park Commission, the Board of Supervisors, the Mayor, and the Department of the Environment expressing your opposition to the four-year extension. Ask for a maximum extension of one year — and then the wheel should be removed from Golden Gate Park forever!

If you are interested in being kept informed on the status of the wheel in Golden Gate Park, email kathyhoward@earthblink.net so we can send you updates as we continue to track the developments.

Katherine Howard is a member of the Sierra Club's San Francisco Group Executive Committee.

Good News on Saving Tesla Park, but More Work Needed

NORMAN LA FORCE



For nearly three decades, the California State Parks Department has attempted to expand the Carnegie Off-Road Vehicle Park that straddles Eastern Alameda and Western San Joaquin Counties by adding the area known as Corral Hollow or “Tesla Park.” The Sierra Club, along with Friends of Tesla Park and the Sustainability, Parks, Recycling, and Wildlife Legal Defense Fund (SPRAWLDEF), has opposed this expansion because it would cause valuable habitat areas to be destroyed by off-road joyriding, as the lands of the existing Carnegie Park have been.

A few years ago, the State Parks department completed an environmental impact report (EIR) on allowing off-road vehicles into Tesla Park. A number of organizations and entities sued, including the County of Alameda, which recently won a major legal victory. The court agreed with the County that State Parks had failed to prepare an adequate EIR, especially since it did not include a non-motorized alternative.

This is a victory for wildlife and habitat, but it is not the end of the story. State Parks can attempt another environmental impact report, and if deemed adequate, could have their expansion approved.

In 2019, Governor Newsom refused to sign a bill that would have given State Parks the authority to sell or transfer the area to another park agency, or place a conservation easement over the land to protect it. Local groups have already gathered the funds to purchase and permanently protect the land, they just need Newsom to allow them the opportunity.

Late last year, Newsom signed an executive order supporting the protection of California’s biodiversity. We need to help Newsom understand that saving Tesla Park would directly align with this goal.

Tesla Park is a biodiversity hotspot, recognized by generations of scientists and confirmed by ongoing research. The area is home to a multitude of threatened, endangered and special status plants and animals, and sensitive vegetation habitats. Furthermore, it provides a critical habitat corridor connecting Mount Diablo and the Diablo Range. The land is also important to descendants of California Native American Tribes for its archeological and spiritual features, including sacred ceremonial and burial sites. Tesla Park is the quintessential biologically diverse, culturally significant landscape that must be preserved.

Governor Newsom can take administrative action and re-designate Tesla Park for conservation with no motorized vehicle recreation. You can urge him to do so by sending him a short message using Sierra Club California’s recent action alert (bit.ly/walkthetalkontesla), or by sending your own personalized letter to Governor Gavin Newsom, 1303 10th Street, Suite 1173, Sacramento, CA 95814.

By permanently preserving Tesla Park, we can combat climate change and achieve our goal of protecting 30 percent of the state’s wildlands by 2030. Allowing Tesla Park to be destroyed by air-polluting, greenhouse gas-emitting, environmentally destructive motorized recreation would be a step backwards in our fight against climate change and our mission to protect biologically rich and culturally important lands.

Norman La Force is Chair of the Sierra Club's East Bay Public Lands Committee.





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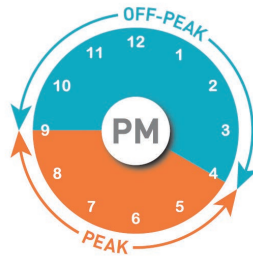
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Changes Coming to Your Energy Bill, Good for Planet and Wallet

MELISSA YU

As part of a statewide effort to create a cleaner energy future, all Californians are being encouraged to shift their energy use to earlier in the day, when renewable resources like solar and wind are most plentiful. Currently, many Bay Area residents are on the E-1 tiered flat-rate plan, which charges the same rate for energy use no matter the time of day. Soon, all PG&E and Community Choice Aggregation (CCA) program* customers on the E-1 plan will automatically be transitioned to a time-of-use rate plan. Under this new state-regulated plan, certain hours of the day are considered more expensive “peak hours.” Peak hours are 4pm to 9pm when energy demand is high and less clean energy is available. The time-of-use plan encourages customers to reduce energy usage during these peak hours and shift some of their energy use by providing lower rates at times when energy demand is low and renewable sources are more available.

Most customers will benefit financially from time-of-use rates. Residential customers who automatically transition will receive risk-free Bill Protection for the first 12 months if they do pay more on the time-of-use rate plan than they would have on their current plan, and PG&E and CCAs will automatically credit the customer the difference for the first year.



The transition to time-of-use rates is part of a California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) effort to support the state’s ongoing shift to cleaner energy. The state’s electrical grid is increasingly powered by clean, renewable sources of energy, especially when the sun is out and winds are high. The challenge is in the late afternoon and evening, when demand for energy peaks. Those hours tend to have the most expensive and most polluting electricity. Customers who can use less electricity during those hours can save money, and help ensure energy is coming from clean sources.

The transition to this time-of-use rate plan will occur by geographical region starting April 2021. All automatically enrolled customers will receive a series of notifications by mail and email starting four months before the automatic transition for their county. Outreach will include tips on how to manage your energy usage in the new system and a personalized rate comparison to help customers select the best rate plan for their needs. Not all customers will automatically transition, including Medical Baseline customers and those already on a time-of-use plan such as the Electric Vehicle Rate Plan.

To find out more information about when your county will transition, go to sierraclub.org/sfbay/TOU or email Melissa Yu at melissa.yu@sierraclub.org.

*If you live in the Bay Area and you didn’t opt out, we’re happy to report that you’re a customer of a locally run, non-profit CCA. Learn more at: sierraclub.org/sfbay/community-choice-energy.

Melissa Yu is an organizer for the SF Bay Chapter.

— — — — — cut here — — — — —

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Democracy Is Messy...but We Can Do Better Than 2% Turnout

LUCY CLAIRE CURRAN, SARAH RANNEY AND PEGGY DA SILVA

Throughout 2020, nominations and elections took front and center stage. Debates raged, voters were recruited, votes were counted, objections were raised, and election results were finally certified.

Is this a description of the national elections across the U.S.? Yes, but in this case we're talking about the San Francisco Bay Chapter of the Sierra Club. Every year, our Chapter – as part of the messily democratic Sierra Club – has the opportunity to elect its officers. The Chapter invites all members to vote, and leaders at different levels compete for seats. As in our country's elections, some types of people are more likely to run for office, and some more likely to be elected. And just like in the United States elections, voters can be confused and too busy to pay attention. In 2020, a majority (over 60 percent) of the people eligible to vote in the United States actually did exercise that right. In our Chapter, just 2 percent of members voted.

This past year, noting a multi-year trend of low voter turnout, our Nominations and Elections Committee decided to do everything that we could to increase member participation in the nomination and election process. We strongly believe that more diversity in ideas for protecting our precious environment – and supporting the health of all of its beings – will make us stronger.

Recognizing that our leadership structure might be daunting and present barriers to candidates who could bring in new perspectives and voices to the club, we committed to making our process as clear, fair, straightforward and welcoming as possible.

We started in January with ambitions to: interact with member-voters and Chapter and Group leaders, revise the Nominations packets, support all candidates in the process (whether nominated or petition), hold informational gatherings, and assure that all printed materials were clear and succinct.

Then the pandemic hit. Everyone's focus was changed, and we couldn't gather to meet, greet and/or gather petitions. The Committee (made up of experienced and newer Sierra Club members, half with service on previous years' Nom/



Elections Committees) switched to Zoom along with the rest of the world, and made the best possible use of Chapter communication channels including the website and social media.

Despite the challenge of a pandemic year, the Nomination and Elections Committee put numerous new processes, systems, and rules in place to make the process easier and more accessible. All of this took a whole lot of time. And then... only 2 percent of our members voted. We understand that 2020 was an incredibly stressful year for everyone, and that this year continues to be no different. We acknowledge that not all of our members may have the time or energy available to focus on these elections right now. But out of our 35,000 members in the SF Bay Chapter, we hope to dramatically increase the number of voters as a first step toward engaging our local members in the important local policy and conservation work of the Chapter. What will it take to get 50% of our members to vote?

Please put it on your New Year's 2021 resolutions to VOTE in the public elections and the Sierra Club elections this year. National elections will come this Spring – that's for our Board of Directors. And Chapter elections will be held in the Fall. NOW is not too early to begin participating – via Zoom – in the Chapter and Group meetings. Think about what you have to offer, commit to learning about and voting for your leaders, and possibly put your hat in the ring.

The Chapter ExComm will appoint a Nominations Committee soon. What is your answer to the questions raised here?

- **Does it matter if we vote in Sierra Club elections?**
- **What will it take to get 50 percent of our members to vote?**

Let us know your thoughts or any questions you have by contacting us at elections@sfbaysc.org. Our planet will be healthier because you are one of the 35,000.

Lucy Claire Curran, Sarah Ranney and Peggy da Silva for the SF Bay Chapter Nominations and Elections Committee.

New Leadership at San Francisco's Water Agency Can Help Heal Our Bay

WILLIAM MARTIN

Most San Franciscans know that their drinking water, among the best in the world, comes from Hetch Hetchy in the Sierras. Hetch Hetchy dams the Tuolumne River which originates in Yosemite National Park.

However, many San Franciscans probably have no idea that the state has determined that more water is needed in the Tuolumne to help heal severe harm done to the salmon population and the health of the San Francisco Bay and Delta. Instead of doing its part, the City, at the urging of the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission staff, has sued the state to block these stronger protections.

Instead of being a river of pure snowmelt, full of salmon and trout, downstream of the dams the Tuolumne is a trickle of warm water inhospitable to salmon and other native wildlife.

Further downstream, where the Tuolumne water once fed the Delta and Bay, stagnant water now turns to cesspools of toxic blue-green algae. Getting more Sierra river water flowing back through the Delta and Bay is the solution identified by state environmental officials, but San Francisco, under the direction of SFPUC staff, is refusing to do its part. This flies in the face of San Franciscans' demonstrated prioritization of the environment.

Once-abundant salmon runs that helped feed the Bay Area and beyond are weak and sick. As a result, the commercial fishing industry that built Fishermen's Wharf is almost gone, costing us local, sustainable jobs. The answer is for the City of San Francisco to lead the way in restoring the river and to do its part to help restore the Delta and Bay.

We know that there's enough water to supply the City while protecting the environment because San Franciscan cut

a third of their water use during the last drought. Instead of reflecting City residents' experience and values, the SFPUC now argues that conserving won't work, citing faulty studies to argue for the keeping of the status quo.

Recently, the National Marine Fisheries Service commissioned a group of independent scientists to examine studies the SFPUC staff paid for to prop up its no-compromise position. The independent scientists found the studies had little to no scientific validity.

The SFPUC is woefully behind other major California communities including Los Angeles, San Diego and Orange County in using water wisely. Water recycling, and other 21st-century water tools, can reduce our dependence on the rivers supplying the Bay-Delta, particularly in dry years.

They can also reduce the risk to our water supply from climate change. Instead of working with local groups to adopt such tools, the SFPUC is teaming up with anti-environmental San Joaquin Valley water districts.

Recently the General Manager of the SFPUC resigned after he was indicted on corruption charges. This indictment and the SFPUC staff's anti-environmental positions highlight the need for new leadership at the agency.

Mayor Breed didn't create this problem. She just had the bad luck of inheriting it. Mayor Breed and the SFPUC Commission will now appoint a new General Manager, and it's crucial that they bring in a highly qualified, environmentally responsible outsider. Many highly qualified candidates would jump at the chance of guiding San Francisco back to being a progressive, high tech, environmental leader.

San Francisco residents, we urge you to take action and ask Mayor Breed to hire a new General Manager of the SFPUC who reflects San Francisco's values and leadership in protecting the environment. You can do so by using our action alert to send a personalized message to Mayor Breed at bit.ly/healourbay.

William Martin is a member of the SF Bay Chapter Water Committee.



State Court Knocks Down Lawsuits Challenging Richmond Coal Ordinance

JACOB KLEIN

Last year, the City of Richmond passed an ordinance to phase out the storage and handling of coal and petroleum coke (or petcoke) over three years in order to protect the health of its residents. This came after significant pressure from local activists and organizations via the No Coal in Richmond movement. In response to this ordinance, numerous lawsuits were filed against the city, in both state and federal court, by the Levin-Richmond Terminal, Phillips 66, and the Wolverine Fuels (the Utah-based coal company).

On Christmas Eve 2020, the state court ruled in favor of the city on all claims challenging the Richmond coal/petcoke ordinance, including the principal claim that the city allegedly violated the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) when it enacted the ordinance. Specifically, the court ruled that “[t]here is substantial evidence that coal and petcoke dust are harmful to human health based on a number of scientific studies and reports” and that the city properly relied on a “categorical exemption” under CEQA, because the ordinance “will prevent more coal and petcoke dust from entering the air the City of Richmond” and thus will benefit the city’s environment and the health of its residents. Although the companies could appeal the state court’s decision, this is a promising sign of the strength of Richmond’s ordinance.

This is a big win for the people of Richmond who fought hard to protect their air quality. Richmond faces disproportionate air quality issues and received a Community Air Grant to identify and reduce emissions.

The federal litigation against Richmond is still pending. Sierra Club and SF Baykeeper have intervened, as promised, as defending parties in these cases to support the City of Richmond in protecting its public health. However, the state of Utah has also been allowed to intervene in a similar manner. Many Utah activists are upset that their Attorney General would make a move that protects corporate interests rather than a community’s right to protect its public health.

One Utah lawmaker, Rep. Andrew Stoddard, recently filed a bill to impeach the Attorney General, Sean Reyes.

Rep. Stoddard says that Reyes has “put the aims of special interest groups above the voters who elected him.” Reyes also backed challenges to the presidential election results from former-President Trump and other Republicans.

The office of the Attorney General of California filed an amicus brief in support of Richmond’s ordinance for the federal legislation. We are waiting to hear more and hope that the federal courts will support the Richmond community.

Meanwhile in Richmond, a progressive majority now holds power on the City Council. Councilmember Melvin Willis, who voted in support of the ordinance, kept his seat. Former mayor Gayle McLaughlin secured a council seat and has a long track record of environmental support. And Claudia Jimenez, an activist and organizer who supported the No Coal in Richmond Movement, also secured a seat. These three, along with Councilmember Eduardo Martinez, who introduced the ordinance, give us hope for Richmond’s future.

To read the court order from the Superior Court of the State of California, head to our blog: sierraclub.org/sfbay/blog.

Jacob Klein is an organizer for the SF Bay Chapter.



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Get started at bit.ly/sunpowerforthebay to get your free quote and find out how much you can save.

Balancing Trail Access and Safety in East Bay Parks

NORMAN LA FORCE

One of the greatest joys of living in the East Bay is hiking the trails in the many parks of the East Bay Regional Park District. The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed how vital and important the park system is for people's physical and mental health. In addition to hikers, mobility-challenged users in wheelchairs, joggers, dog-walkers, equestrians, mountain bikers, and electric-bike riders also enjoy the trails. As stakeholders of this public park system, we have to think about how we can ensure access for all park users while protecting public safety, wildlife, and sensitive habitats.

The Park District has both narrow trails, generally under 8 feet in width, and wider trails, which are usually old ranch roads or fire roads. In the early 1980's, the Park District opened up the wider trails to mountain bikes. This gave mountain bikers access to 80 percent of all trails. In addition, in the early 2000's, the Park District created a pump trail system within the Crockett Hills Regional Park specifically for mountain bikers. Meanwhile, 30 narrow trails have been opened up for mountain bikers throughout the park system.

According to the Park District's own survey data, 82 to 88 percent of trail users are pedestrians or hikers, 10 to 12 percent are mountain bikers, and 5 percent are equestrians. The survey data also showed that 80 to 90 percent of trail users favored trails dedicated to pedestrian and equestrian users.

Currently, the East Bay Regional Park District is engaged in a process for evaluating how to manage user access on their narrow trails. This process takes place in the context of the mountain biking community's call for the opening up of more narrow trails to mountain bikes, and the Park District's recent announcement that all new narrow trails will be designed and constructed for all users. The Park District has also proposed allowing mountain bikes on existing narrow trails that are primarily used by the large population of pedestrians, as well as equestrians. That proposal would result in a significant change to the trail experience of the District's 25 million annual park users.

The "narrow multi-use trails for all" concept raises significant issues. Ample evidence from past experience, both from within EBRPD and from other park agencies, illustrates that narrow trails designed primarily for bicycles result in hikers



and equestrians avoiding those trails. Likewise, a group of people walking or riding on a narrow trail is often a frustrating experience for a mountain biker who has built up speed going downhill. The accompanying diagram shows just how tight the situation can become on a narrow trail.

Beginning in 2017, the Sierra Club asked the Park District to create a facilitated workshop of various user groups to see if a consensus could be reached on these issues. Finally, in 2020 the Park Board created the Trails Users Working Group (TUWG).

To examine this issue, we ask that the this group provide or address:

- Baseline data on the District's trail use, wildlife and habitat along proposed narrow trails, and accident, complaint, and enforcement responses;
- Impacts of all scenarios and district capacity to address impacts; and
- Trail policy alternatives that can protect the parks' biodiversity and preserve positive experiences for all trail users.

The Sierra Club has a White Paper on the issues which can be accessed at bit.ly/eastbaytrails.

Members can also let the Park District Board and staff know of their concerns. You can send a letter to their mailing address below, or use their online contact form at this link: bit.ly/eastbayparkscontact.

East Bay Regional Parks District
2950 Peralta Oaks Court
P.O. Box 5381
Oakland, CA 94605-0381

If you want to learn more about the work of the East Bay Public Lands Committee, contact committee chair Norman La Force at n.laforce@comcast.net.



An Eastern fox squirrel sneaks a peek over a fence in an El Cerrito backyard. Photo by Kiera Hargrove. For a chance to get your snapshots featured in the next issue of the Yodeler, email photos to yodedit@sfbaysc.org. Include your name, the names of any people in the photo, and where and when the photo was taken.

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SIERRACLUB.ORG/SFBAY

Our website is home to helpful information and resources including:

- Our blog, updated regularly
- The full events and activities calendar
- Group information and leadership roster

ANNOUNCEMENTS

- Donate your vehicle to support our chapter and get a tax deduction (p.3)
- This year, our annual Beginner's Backpacking course goes virtual (p. 4)
- Green Friday educational programs are live on Zoom this spring (p. 4)

EMAIL

Visit sierraclub.org/sfbay/email to sign up for Bay Chapter emails, including monthly bulletins and action alerts.