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

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Meet a water visionary

SANTA LUCIAN
Protecting and Preserving the Central Coast

Why We Sue

For the Cayucos Viewshed

Sierra Club sues to fix flawed Cayucos Viewshed ordinance. Action would force revision of environmental impacts of controversial measure.

The Santa Lucia Chapter of the Sierra Club filed suit against the County of San Luis Obispo on January 17. We are challenging the Cayucos Viewshed ordinance as approved by Supervisors Ovitt, Achadjian and Lenthall in one of the most controversial actions taken by the County Board of Supervisors last year.

"Projects permitted and built under this ordinance would significantly degrade scenic public views in one of this county’s signature landscapes," said Karen Merriam, Chair of the Sierra Club’s Santa Lucia Chapter. "The Sierra Club cannot stand by and allow such an act of destruction to take place. On behalf of this irreplaceable landscape and the hundreds of citizens who asked the supervisors to honor a sound planning process and the broad public opposition to narrow private interests, the Sierra Club must take this bold action to fix the problem the board created."

The board majority was widely criticized for passing the ordinance as drafted by a private property rights group and ignoring more protective drafts prepared by county planners and unanimously approved by the supervisors’ appointees on the County Planning Commission. Planning staff had found that the “prominent ridgeline” standard developed by Protect our Property Rights (POPR) was flawed and unusable. The board of supervisors ignored this fundamental flaw, agreed to reduce the area recommended by the Planning Commission by more than nine-tenths and add multiple exemptions for landowners and future land speculators wishing to build homes on ridgelines. The Sierra Club’s lawsuit is designed to protect the viewshed from inappropriate development and safeguard environmental resources in the area by keeping current standards in place and preventing any projects from going forward under the new ordinance; stop the precedent-setting nature of the ordinance from weakening other viewshed protection policies elsewhere in the county by requiring a full Environmental Impact Report (EIR) with a complete alternatives analysis;

highlight the county’s consistent abuse of state law through the inappropriate use of ‘Negative Declarations’ claiming no environmental impacts, and put an end to that abuse. An EIR would require that the county put mitigations in place for any identified impacts to the environment resulting from the broad loopholes in the ordinance. (Example: Under the ordinance, a home on a 2,600-foot long ridgeline would have to be larger than a football field to trigger minimal screening requirements.)

The board plowed the process under and consigned 47,000 acres of rear

A Watershed Win

by Jeffrey E. Auerbach, Ph.D., MCC

On January 17, South County residents succeeded in turning back Los Robles del Mar, an unsustainable proposed housing development and annexation that had been heading for inevitable approval for over ten years. This is the story of their extraordinary grassroots victory.

It was January 19, 2006. My wife Jeanne and I were at the Avila Club and I picked up a copy of the Tribune. The top story of the local section said: “Pismo Council OKs Housing Plan…"

The record overflow crowd at the Jan. 17 LAFCO meeting.

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General Meeting

What's In Your Creek?

Quite a lot that you may not want! Get the big-picture of watershed management from the experts and hear the first-hand experience of the struggle to clean up Nipomo Creek from some determined local residents. Find out what’s getting into your own beloved local waterway.

7 p.m., Friday, February 22
St. Stephens Episcopal Church
1334 Nipomo St., San Luis Obispo
Pismo Street entrance
parking lot off Pismo.

Water that Works

If you hear only one international wastewater treatment visionary this year...

SLO Green Build, the San Luis Bay Chapter of the Surfrider Foundation, and the Santa Lucia Chapter of the Sierra Club are working together with government agencies to educate the community on emerging technologies that will aid in sustainable development and green building. The first phase of the campaign will focus on technologies that help conserve water — just in time to help out areas such as the Nipomo Mesa, Los Osos and Cambria, which are rated at critical Level III water severity.

The education campaign will kick off Feb. 6th and 7th with keynote speaker Jonathan Todd of Todd Ecological Design, Inc., an award-winning water and natural resources planning firm. Todd Ecological (www.todd ecological.com) has been featured in CNN International and Audubon magazine as an ecological visionary of the 21st century, providing comprehensive construction, design, consulting, and facility operations services to public and private clients for cost-effective aesthetic solutions to wastewater, storm water, aquatic environment management, and bio-solids conversion.

At each of two events, Todd will address appropriate technology in San Luis Obispo county, including the Los Osos wastewater treatment project. The events will feature a display of technologies such as composting toilets, gray water systems, dual flush toilets and much more. There will be refreshments, food and music. We will raffle off several prizes including a dual flush toilet, surfboard, and an overnight stay at TreeBones Resort in Big Sur.

Schedule of Events:
- 2/5/08, Morning site tour of Los Osos to develop a Todd Ecological Proposal Project for submittal to SLO County’s Los Osos Waste Water Treatment Project. Tour by Chuck Cesena, director of LOCSD.
- 1 pm, Meeting w/ SLO County Los Osos Project Team @ SLO Gov’t Center.

Statement from the State of California Office of Appropriate Technology:
"The use of appropriate technology can help make possible energy optimization, water conservation and affordable housing.

SANTA LUCIAN
Feb. 2008

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The Santa Lucian is published 10 times a year. Articles, environmental information and letters to the editor are welcome. The deadline for each issue is the 15th of the prior month.

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The Executive Committee meets the fourth Tuesday of every month at 7:30 p.m. at the chapter office, located at 547-B Marsh St., San Luis Obispo. All members are welcome to attend.

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Outings, events, and more!
Bring Back the Coast Daylight Train!

Would you take the train from SLO to San Francisco if there was one? And if it was easy, fast, and on time? And if it cost around $40? Then you need to get behind the Coast Daylight Project, restoring daily train service between L.A. and S.F. for the first time in 35 years.

This was the gist of the Rail Passen- ger Association of California meeting held at the SLO public library on Janu- ary 19, led by RailPAC President Paul Dyson.

The Sierra Club is all about mass transit alternatives to car and air travel, easing traffic congestion and putting a significant dent in global warming emissions via increased rail travel...so let’s all get on board this train!

For the state to allocate the funds to do it right (planners are keenly aware impact report done on the impact of pumping or the developer transferring the title of the three wells to the City of Pismo Beach or the City’s plan to pump for “for unlimited use.” Neighbors got involved big time. We What was accomplished today is unprecedented in our County, and a landmark decision that will aid our position on future land use matters for many years.

- John Schwind, OPCG Board Member

Sierra Student Coalition Coming to Cal Poly

In the fall of 2007, after attending the Chico State Sustainability Conference, members of the Empower Poly Coalition (EPC) decided to establish a Cal Poly chapter of the Sierra Club’s national student coalition.

The Sierra Stu- dent Coalition is the nation’s largest student-led environ- mental group, with over 250 affiliated groups at schools around the country. EPC members Ben Echold, a sus- tainable business major, and Jorge Montesuma, an engineering major, decided it was time to integrate more students into the environmental movement by offering an alternative path within the student community to train, empower, and or- ganize youth to run effective environ- mental campaigns that result in tangi- ble victories and leadership develop- ment.

To accomplish this, they have been working with Empower Poly to help develop the second annual student sustainability leadership conference, working with the California Energy Commission to set up the framework for the chapter.

“Be the Change ’08,” which will be held at the Cal Poly campus on April 26th. Once it receives its campus charter, the Cal Poly Sierra Student Coalition hopes to facilitate the connection between Cal Poly students and the Santa Lucia Chapter of the Sierra Club.

For more information, contact calpolycsc@gmail.com

Watershed Win continued from page 1

“The City Council approved the proposal Nov. 16, 2006, on the condition that the developers could prove water from two city wells – which haven’t been used in 10 years – is treatable. The developers couldn’t. Instead, they showed that three wells on the Los Robles property contain enough, treatable water to serve the develop- ment.”

I looked at my wife and said, “Wait a minute, we live right near there, they must be talking about pumping the water from under our neighborhood’s homes – that’s where we get our water from. They might pump so much that all our wells could go dry.”

Jeanne looked worried. “I had a hectic work schedule coming up and I said to her, “Maybe you could call the county and find out more about this?” We were both so busy we never seemed to get around to it. Finally she gave the county a call and found out that the Local Agency Formation Commission knew about the City of Pismo Beach’s plans because Pismo Beach was trying to annex the LRDM parcel.

Jeanne ended up talking to David Christie at LACO, one of the county’s most diligent public servants. He provided us with some initial docu- ments on the proposed annexation, especially related to the source of water for the 312-residence development. It turned out there was no environmental

The denial of annexation was “without prejudice,” meaning that Pismo Beach or the City’s plan to pump for unlimited use was discounted in the SEIR, when in fact there were documented cases of impacts on wetlands and oaks due to the project in several ways:

·  Many of the parcels contain some environmental values would plummet and people might have to abandon their homes.

·  Some of the parcels contain a significant area of agricultural usage, which has water requirements far beyond those of residence use.

What a Meeting That Was

Harry Goodnight on the Jan. 17 LAPCO Los Robles del Mar annexation hearing

Public comments proceeded for over four hours, with most people speaking against LRDM.

Several members of EPC related anecdotes about how they had to redrlill wells during the past two years, and how the quality of water from those wells had suffered. Several people talked about the issue of their land for agricultur- e, with many acres planted grapes and olive trees. They related how loss of water would cause them severe eco- nomic as well as aesthetic losses. The commentary also highlighted that the SEIR had severely underestimated the expected use of the parcels adjacent to the project in several ways:

·  There are 742 parcels in the Oak Park basin, not all of which are developed, but will be developed in the coming years.

·  The number of parcels and expected new dwellings that that will be built, the water usage of these parcels was severely underestimated.

·  Many of the parcels contain some aspect of agricultural usage, which has water requirements far beyond those of residence use.

·  Should the aquifer be put in over- draft, the only recourse would be to sue SLO County, Pismo Beach, and Arroyo Grande. In the meantime, property values would plummet and people might have to abandon their homes.

Environmental impacts on wetlands and riparian areas in Oak Park Canyon were discounted in the SEIR, when in fact there were documented cases of impacts on wetlands and oaks due to the drought, without LRDM pumping.

The denial of annexation was “without prejud- ice,” meaning that Pismo Beach does not need to wait a full 12 months to resubmit the application for annex- ation, should they be able to identify a source of water for LRDM. It isn’t over til the fat lady sings!

By Rochelle Becher Chair, Nuclear Power Task Force

Nov 29-Dec 3: It was my honor as the west-of-the-Mississippi member of the Sierra Club’s Ranching Committee’s and the Club’s first nationwide forum on the cradle-to-grave pitfalls of nuclear power. Sitting in rocking chairs atop a beautiful mountain overlooking a Tennessee Valley of fall colors, Sierra Club women came together to seek solutions. What is the solution to the mounting stockpile of high-level radioactive waste near the rail station and then shipped south and west to Yucca Mountain near Santa Barbara on the coast rail line. This clearly puts the burden for emergency preparedness, infrastructure improvements and logistics on our county. David asked the DOE officials for answers on the costs of training emergency responders, paying for improvements and other transport-related questions. It’s time only on behalf of SLO, but San Bernadino, Riverside and Imperial, which will also be seeing the loads from Arizona, Texas and Louisiana passing through. David also asked the DOE why they didn’t hold public hearings in these impacted areas and quizzed them on their lack of public hearings in California’s state legislators. He then brought these issues to SLO County Supervisors, who introduced the issue, and also to the attention of the Tribune, which ran a cover story the following Sunday at www.slotribune.com/news/local/story/21310.html.

Dec 10: David Weisman and I attended state Senator Kehoe’s hearing on the status of nuclear waste. Economist Jim Harding gave testimony on the overly optimistic predictions of the nuclear industry in its pursuit of new reactors. But it was Carl Zichella, Sierra Club’s regional director for Hawaii, Nevada and California, who brought down the ire of Assemblyman Chuck DeVore. Carl quoted from former Vice-President Al Gore (“I doubt if [nuclear plants] will play a significant role in most countries as a new source of electric generating revenue.”) He also stressed increasing economic risks, the long time lag in getting nuclear reactors on line, and issues of local and proliferation. HisSEMBLYMAN D’VOIRE, whose bill to over- throw California’s nuclear safety laws died in committee last Spring and who was my 13 years in the aerospace industry, never held public hearings on this bill. Mr. DeVore blogged: “Wholly unconvinced in his testimony was Carl Zichella, the Regional Field Director of the Sierra Club. Perhaps it was my 13 years in the aerospace industry or my 24 years as a military intelligence officer, but using a large number of scary sounding adjectives does not make up for an lack of data.” Mr. DeVore appears to persist in his belief that personally attacking those he disagrees with will be productive. The next day, Mr. DeVorre blogged: “Wholly unconvinced in his testimony was Carl Zichella, the Regional Field Director of the Sierra Club. Perhaps it was my 13 years in the aerospace industry or my 24 years as a military intelligence officer, but using a large number of scary sounding adjectives does not make up for an lack of data.” Mr. DeVore appears to persist in his belief that personally attacking those he disagrees with will be productive.

Dec 12: The California Energy Commission held its first workshop on the scope of its cradle-to-grave cost benefit and risk analysis of the state’s dependence on nuclear power. I presented the contractors with a list of additions to the scope, as did Assemblyman Mr. DeVore (and Alliance for Nuclear Responsibility will file comments, posted at asker.com, along with comments to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission on impacts of air attacks.)

Abuse of Agricultural Exemptions Will Hurt Farmers

By Sue Harvey

There are some towering questions on Highway 41

Should anyone who gets caught violating our county codes by undertaking commercial development with a permit, falsely claiming the work is for agricultural activities and therefore exempt from permit, be allowed to get off without a fine? What if the project he is pursuing not only lacked proper permits, but was clearly not allowable under the policies of our county’s General Plan? Should the California Farmer’s Association and allowed to profit from those activities? Does it matter whether a County to issue an “after the fact” permit to legal- ize something that would not be approvable on an unrestricted site? These are the questions that County Planning Commissioners considered last July when they grappled with and tentatively approved, on a 3-2 vote, several new cell phone tower plans. The request was for the installation of new cell sites, instead of a barn they found a se- ries of dummy cell servicers on the “build- ing pad” and an over- sized electrical panel. Claiming that his grading activities were un- der taken in the name of agriculture is an insult to this county’s farmers and ranchers who utilize this exemption for legitimate ag pur- poses.

The gentleman has a contract with Sprint/Nextel to pro- vide and lease the site with the permit. Apparently, he does not have a contract for any agricultural products. While the value of the cell Service contract was not disclosed, a similar arrangement with Nextel in Cambria would have netted that land owner $50,000 per year. So by a conservative esti- mate, the Highway 41 site will generate at least $5,000 per month – more if other cell providers add on, which they are certain to do. The County’s general plan poli- cies discourage new cell sites where “co- location” with existing towers or other structures, such as power poles, are available. In fact, approval of a new site is the last of five options spelled out by order of preference in Section 22.30.10 of the County’s Land Use Ordinance. So, are there other options for Nextel’s cell towers in that area? You bet there are. Nextel’s representative told the Planning Commission that there are at least three other existing sites in the area, while not optimal, would provide adequate cover- age for its customers. According to County staff, the permits for those facilities require the operators to make the antennas available to other cell service providers. So logic and reason would dictate that local decision- makers would deny the permit, require the violator to restore the site, impose a fine to cover the costs of processing the case, and urge Nextel to work on a co- location agreement with an existing operator.

Unfortunately, the Planning Commis- sion voted to issue the permit, in viola- tion of Title 22, thereby allowing the violator to get off virtually scot-free and look forward to a handsome profit and a steady income as a result of his actions.

There is another problem with the High- way 41 Nextel cell towers boondoggle: When developers are allowed to exploit exemptions that were designed to give farmers and ranchers relief from county regulations, they risk ruining the system for genuine agriculturalists. Grading roads, drilling wells, cutting down trees and clearing building pads are all activities that typically require permits, public notice and environmental review. But if these are being done to support agricul- tural activities, no review is needed. The problem is, all a developer has to do is get on a planning board and look a county code enforcement officer in the eye and say “It’s for my ag operation” and all postures of land development and the waters magically evaporates. Given the scale and frequency of abuse (wells and roads on Santa Margarita Ranch, the airstrip on the La Panza Ranch, the hilltop homesites, wells and roads on the Pierson/Kelegian Ranch on Highway 58, wholesale clearing of oak woodlands on the Bonheim Ranch, and the infamous “Cayucos Castle” aka Lavender farm, to name a few), it is time for the County to rein in the bad actors.

One obvious step is to require a “rancher” to come in to the County Planning Department and actually ap- ply for the permit. They could be required to show that they have a legiti- mate agricultural-based need for the development, and that it fits with all the parameters of the exemptions. It is unfortunate that real ranchers and farmers showing up to suffer through the unscupulous activities of develop- ers. But allowing such abuse to con- tinue is even worse.

Do we need to create more programs to fund their deadly generation of truly independent, economic, renew- able, sustainable and non-nuclear en- ergy future? No.

Nov 29: Alliance for Nuclear Responsibility out- side coordinator David Wideman drove six hours from San Luis Obispo to Lone Pine, California, to attend the one and only hearing on the Yucca Mountains, years and decades determined to find a path that would bring more than a “Sophie’s Choice” for our country’s general generation needs. And these were women both proud and grateful to be working with the Sierra Club to create a legacy of

and a reporter from the L.A. Times. There was an important bit of informa- tion awaiting Mr. Weisman. Careful examination of the display screens of their newest maps for trans- port routes to Yucca revealed that the radioactive waste could be sent to a Canyon, rather than being barged down the coast to Pt. Huetera, would be traveling on oversize and overweight trucks on local SLO roads through Avila to the rail station and then shipped south and west, or even up the LA river route to Yucca Mountain.

Gaming the System

By Sue Harvey

There are some towering questions on Highway 41
Taking Issue
problematic environmental coverage & commentary in our local media


Summary: Buying local may not be a sound policy, global-warming wise, as UC Davis researchers have found that small quantities of food transported a short distance may result in more per capita carbon emissions than large quantities of food shipped over long distances.

What the researchers actually found, per a literature review, was that “local” food systems in Iowa based on small trucks carrying food to farmers markets and local institutions feasibly consume two to four times as much fuel as a regional food system using larger semitrailers and mid-sized trucks, but that both those scales of transport “are estimated to use from only one-tenth to a quarter of the fuel consumed by the conventional, long-distance distribution system to distribute the same quantity of food.”

If mass producers of strawberries ship their product to Chicago by truck, the fuel cost of transporting each carton of strawberries is relatively small...but if a farmer sells his strawberries at local farmers’ markets in California, he ferries a much smaller amount by pickup truck to each individual market. Which one is better for the environment?

Upshot: “Taking Issue” fans will recall our dissections of “Antibiotic-free strawberries shipped from Mexico” (Nov/Dec. Santa Lucian) didn’t address the effects of global warming on the waste supply (and therefore the viability of desal). Since your recommendation was to conserve the available water, there must be enough water to conserve. I was hoping for a discussion of rainfall predictions based on global warming that – from what I read – is making the West drier and hotter. What concerns me is that this combination could rule out conservation. Gambling that there will be sufficient rainfall without the science to back it up could be catastrophic for Cambria. If the wells dry up, Cambrians would end up relying on water tankers or other emergency means. That would wipe out tourism and property values and probably the community. Then there’s the fire hazard. Without full water storage tanks, anything but a small and easily contained fire would be disastrous. (According to Cambria fire chief, Bob Putney, fires must be knocked down in the first hour, so out of town help and borate bombers are not an alternative.)

I assume you have discussed these scenarios and measured the global warming impact on the use of desalination, but that analysis did not show up in the article. If you didn’t start with a default position that desal is bad and only used data that supported your case) desal certainly has drawbacks, but we need to reevaluate our beliefs as the world changes. The elephant in the room in any desal discussion is global warming. Not talking about it makes any analysis or conclusions about desal suspect.

Your article on desal projects on the Central Coast. “Where’s the Water?” (Nov/Dec. Santa Lucian) didn’t address the effects of global warming on the water supply (and therefore the viability of desal). Since your recommendation was to conserve the available water, there must be enough water to conserve. I was hoping for a discussion of rainfall predictions based on global warming that – from what I read – is making the West drier and hotter. What concerns me is that this combination could rule out conservation. Gambling that there will be sufficient rainfall without the science to back it up could be catastrophic for Cambria. If the wells dry up, Cambrians would end up relying on water tankers or other emergency means. That would wipe out tourism and property values and probably the community. Then there’s the fire hazard. Without full water storage tanks, anything but a small and easily contained fire would be disastrous. (According to Cambria fire chief, Bob Putney, fires must be knocked down in the first hour, so out of town help and borate bombers are not an alternative.)

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Letters

send to: sierra@charter.net, or P.O. Box 15755, San Luis Obispo, CA 93406. Letters may be edited for space.

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The effects of global warming – which will actually result in more rain in some locations — are indeed a concern in any estimation of future water availability and needs. But desalination plants are not exempt from that concern. The rising sea levels and projected increase in frequency and intensity of extreme storms that are part of the picture of global climate change are bad news for coastal desal facilities and their vulnerable intake and outfall structures. No California desal plant in operation or on the drawing boards includes any adaptive measures to incorporate the effects of climate change into its design. Additionally, because desalination is the most energy-intensive water source, operation of desal plants represents a significant increase in fossil-fuel consumption and greenhouse gas emissions. It’s clear that just throwing desal plants at the problem is not the answer Cambria’s residents would do well to bring pressure to bear on their Community Services District, which, having tried and failed with a botched desal project, should now turn to the kind of comprehensive reclamation measures and intelligent planning outlined in “Where’s the Water?”

Bill Lakin
20+ year Sierra Club Member
Cambria

As “Where’s the Water?” concluded: “With global climate change affecting weather patterns [and] sea level rise...”
In the first week of 2008, the game changed for local energy issues

by Karen Merrism
Chapter Chair

It may have seemed that not much of importance happened in San Luis Obispo County the week of January 7 — the Atascadero P.D. refused to give a fired officer his job back, Lucia Mar Unified sought to add a culinary academy; Ventura hosted the Cuesta Cougars 86-69 — but two moments, little- noticed events that transpired in local government meetings, will, I predict, be recalled years from now as flashpoints for historic changes that made all the difference between a good quality of life and an unlivable one for every resident of the central coast.

The first occurred on January 8 at the meeting of the San Luis Obispo City Council. The Council moved to adopt item C-4 on their consent agenda, the place where one puts agenda items to non-controversial they don’t even require discussion or a separate vote: “C4. DATA NEEDS ASSESSMENT FOR A GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS INVENTORY FOR THE CITY OF SAN LUIS OBISPO.” It was on February 8, 2008, that the Sierra Club first brought this policy suggestion to the city planning commission, which promptly agreed to add it to the update of San Luis Obispo’s Conservation and Open Space Element, where it became Energy Policy 4.30.18.

In the two years between then and now, we worked with our friends on the city council to turn that policy into reality. Now that it is, SLO can figure out how much carbon it’s putting into the atmosphere and how much it needs to cut, implement programs, policies and technologies to hit those targets, and monitor progress. The inevitable result will be the encouragement of energy efficiency, conservation, and local industry based on green power. The fight to curb climate change in our neck of the woods truly starts here.

The second historic event of the week occurred the next day and three blocks east of SLO City Hall, at the County Government Center, when the opportunity to create a feasibility study for Community Choice Aggregation (CCA) appeared before the SLO Council of Governments. CCA is a state law that gives communities the ability to buy clean, alternative energy from multiple providers and realize, on average, savings of 25 percent over what they pay to investor-owned utilities. Community Choice is the road map and bullet train to a cleaner, healthier, wealthier future for this county.

It wasn’t the first time the assembled mayors and county supervisors had heard about this. In workshop and roundtable discussions at the Regional Energy Planning Conference at Cal Poly last August, they indicated a strong interest in pursuing CCA as a tool for energy planning. Some had heard about it at the October 2006 Smart Energy Solutions Summit, where Sierra Club continued on page 7

Why Wetlands?

by Bill Donnan

Wetlands include estuaries, swamps, bogs, vernal pools, riparian corridors, marshland, creeks and sloughs. California has the dubious honor of having lost more than 90% of its historic wetlands, the largest percentage of any state in our nation. Prior to the arrival of our civilization, the U.S. had 5 million acres of wetlands. Only a half million remain. This is horrendous.

Local example of wetlands are west & south of Guadalupe, Cienega Valley, Oso Flaco Valley, and Black Lake Canyon. The situation gets even worse as we become “Losangelified” and former wetlands start growing houses such as at “Point Sal Dunes.” Just the name is an insult to sacred Point Sal and the unique Pipers Dunes.

The Cienega Valley is the peneplain (think of Arroyo Grande Creek. The Chumash utilized this swamp as a very productive food source for 10,000 years while they lived on adjacent highlands. Our aggressive civilization comes in, drains the swamp, dikes the river and puts in intensive agriculture. Cienega Valley has been very productive ag land for the past few decades but is heading toward inevitable disaster.

Wetlands are sacred to biologists because they provide critical feeding, breeding and spawning grounds for one-third of our endangered plants and animals, and myriad waterfowl, migratory songbirds, and other wildlife. Wetlands recharge ground water supplies, control floods, purify water that flows through them and are the nursery for the fish of the seas (e.g. steelhead trout). Wetlands are vital to the economic and environmental health of our nation, yet they are being lost at the alarming rate of 300,000 acres per year.

Our culture has not been kind to
Very Big Deal continued from page 6

California Energy Committee member Paul Fenn, author of California’s CCA law, explained the concept of CCA to SLO. Both events were created by the local Strategic Energy Alliance for Change (SEAC Change), which Sierra Club co-founded two years ago.

SLOCOG clearly got the picture and for official action, and the results were encouraging. Neither of the historic events of January 8 and 9 “just happened.” Encourage-ment is often needed to make history happen. But for our community, the future began that week.

TAKE ACTION attending the SLOCOG meeting when Community Choice Again comes before that body. Let them know that this must be done and we can’t wait any longer. It’s our future, and the future is now.

Bulbs Across America one year later...

By Teddy Llovet

Since January 2007, I have held 23 demonstration-talks in SLO county on the benefits of energy-saving compact fluorescent light bulbs – CFLs. I christened the program “Bulbs Across America,” inspired by the words that flicker across the screen at the end of An Inconvenient Truth: “If you pray, move your feet.” Those words have become my mantra. I’ve given out free CFLs, compliments of PG&E and Miner Ace Hardware, and demon-strated a vari-ety of CFLs at senior com-munities, clubs, schools, Congregation Beth David, Re-tired Teachers Assn., Earth Day and the Step-It-Up Rally in SLO. Last May, we did a “Kids Teaching Kids” program for after-school kids K-3.

Why Wetlands? continued from page 8

this resource. We have dredged, diked, bulldozed, channelized, diverted, silted in and contaminated this pristine re-source in the name of “progress.” A few years ago there was a big tractor parade in Santa Maria. The parade ended at the County Government Center. Over 200 tractors and farmers gathered to protest regulations designed to protect wet-lands; there was one lone demonstrator for wetlands protection (me). When I carried my sign: “Save Our Creeks” one farmer yelled out: “save our geeks” which got a big laugh (even from me). The farmers invited me to their excel-lent SM-style BBQ which I appreciated. I have watched with great pain the slow inexorable destruction of Oso Flaco Creek. State Parks have been doing a fine job taking care of Oso Flaco Lake itself while at the same time ignoring the drainage into the lake. I first saw this riparian corridor in the 1960’s. I wish I had taken pictures. It had high bio-diversity, giant willows and bulrushes, muskrats, black shouldered kites, raptors, cattails, all kinds of in-sects, amphibians, garter snakes, pond turtles and horsetails. Clear water flowed in the creek. I always stopped here with my biology classes on our way to the Dunes. Now it is a channel-ized, sterile, very silted ditch. It is rapidly filling in Oso Flaco Lake. Agriculture has expanded so that all that is left of this once rich riparian corridor is an ugly ditch. This pains a biologist.

Riparian areas provide wildlife habitat, protect adjacent areas from flooding, filter our drinking water, and clean polluted water. Wetland soils and plants absorb heavy metals, pesticides, and other toxins, prevent-ing them from washing downstream or migrating to groundwater. Through various processes not yet fully understood, they can immobi-lize or transform many toxic sub-stances, removing them from the food chain. The importance of wet-lands may not be readily apparent until after they are destroyed.

Santa Lucian • Feb. 2008

January 8: Santa Lucia Chapter Chair Karen Mennie (right) thanks the San Luis Obispo City Council for implementing the greenhouse gas emissions monitoring program that was placed into the city’s Energy Element at our urging.
In the late 1950s, Americans were largely naive about the risks of nuclear power; “conservation” and “energy effi- ciency” were words from an alien vocabulary, federal subsidies were pouring into commercial nuclear power, and the solar and wind power industries did not exist. The Pacific Gas and Electric Company, giddy with visions of Our Friend the Atom and all the power that could be saved with minimal investment in energy sources, was largely naive about the risks of nuclear power; “conservation” and “energy efficiency” were words from an alien vocabulary, federal subsidies were pouring into commercial nuclear power, and the solar and wind power industries did not exist. The Pacific Gas and Electric Company, giddy with visions of Our Friend the Atom and all the power that would come from Chapter reports.

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from Chapter reports

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saved them from the power plant and enabled their transfer to State Parks. The state promptly declared the dunes a Vehicle Recreation Park, the only place in California where you can legally drive on the beach, and the coastal dune equivalent of Yosemite quickly came to resemble downtown L.A., at rush hour, minus the blacktop. As with PG&E on the Pecho Coast, the Sierra Club has had to fight the state Off Highway Vehicles division and the off-road lobby ever since for every inch of dunes that we’ve managed to reclaim as habitat for endangered and threatened species.

In addition to consigning local residents to a long future of stockpiled iodine pills, sirens tests and that special moment of bated breath and spiking adrenalin every time the ground shakes, perhaps the most serious long-term consequence of our Diablo compromise was its deliverance of San Luis Obispo into the iron grip of the state’s largest privately owned utility. As the home of its most expensive asset, SLO county is now of special interest to PG&E. As the largest private employer in the county, a generous donor to charities and a dis- persary of public largesse, the utility is able to summon at will labor unions, the Farm Bureau, Cattlemen’s Association and sundry chambers of commerce to any public meeting anywhere in the state where it requires a show of support for a development permit, a rate hike, or an extension of the Diablo Canyon Nuclear Power Plant’s lease on life.

And the utility will use every ounce of the political capital it has purchased in San Luis Obispo when the time comes for PG&E to fight implementation of the Community Choice Act – the state law that allows counties and regions to pool their energy purchasing power, break with the utility, buy green energy and support local power start-ups (see “A Very Big Deal,” page 6, and “Whose Choice is it Anyways?,” September 2007 Santa Lucian). PG&E is fighting tooth and nail against such plans in Fresno and San Francisco; when that fight comes here, it promises to be an uphill battle due to PG&E’s beach head in local politics, established four decades ago at Diablo Cove.

Hard Lessons

Forty years ago, the Sierra Club learned some large lessons the hard way. Generational turnover being what it is, and big, hard lessons being what they are, it would be more accurate to say that we remain in the process of learning them.

Lesson One: “Compromise is often necessary. But it ought not originate with the Sierra Club.” Giving up Diablo Cove to save the Nipomo-Oceano Dunes was a matter of sacrificing Peter to save Paul. We accepted PG&E’s promise of “we must have more power” instead of standing for the simple truth that putting another power plant anywhere on the California coast was environmentally unacceptable.

Lesson Two: “Fix the mistake,” not “stay the course.” Throughout 1966-69, the whole focus for the defenders of the Diablo deal was the credibility of the Sierra Club: Repudiating the deal with PG&E would cause the Club to lose face, we would not be taken seriously, etc. Whether the deal was a good or workable deal and what we would be sacrificing by allowing the plant’s construction were clearly secondary considerations – if that – for the Sierra Adams contingent. In the years since, this philosophy has been the hallmark of what became known as the “old guard” in the Sierra Club. Diablo Canyon revealed the first seismic division and culture clash between the old guard and proponents of a new environmental ethic that was first coming into bloom forty years ago. This was the historical moment when the utilitarian conservation ethic of Teddy Roosevelt and Forest Service chief Gifford Pinchot – that we should conserve such land and animals as we deem useful to us and exploitable for our prosperity – came up against the organic/holistic view of nature championed by David Brower, first formed by John Muir and given modern voice by forest manager Aldo Leopold in 1949.

Lesson Three: Democracy is our strength. Any other national environmental organization would have handed down its decision on Diablo Canyon in 1968 and that would have been that. Later, via a direct mail piece or their magazine, the membership would have been told in glowing terms how the organization had saved the Nipomo-Oceano Dunes complex. Some angry letters and resignations might have ensued. In our case, the three-year fight to reverse the decision of the board of directors was possible only because the Sierra Club is set up as a democratic institution, wherein the board is elected by the membership; resolutions can be drafted and submitted by chapters, regional and national conservation committees communicate the will of the membership to the board; and policies are created on that basis. The ability to dissent was unable to turn this tide on Diablo, but in later years it has made the difference, as when grassroots Club activists repeatedly drove forward a policy of “zero cut” on public lands – not a policy endorsing a reduction or a smaller percentage of logging on publicly owned land, but a halt to the practice—ultimately succeeding over the fierce objections and politicking of the old guard, whose arguments against the policy had a familiar ring: It would cause the Club to lose face, we would not be taken seriously, etc.

Why did the dissenters fail to move the Club’s membership on Diablo? It is probably not a coincidence that Sierra Club leadership won every ballot initiative on Diablo by appealing to reputation, stability, and tradition while a bad war in Southeast Asia was...
getting worse, protests were shutting down American universities and politi-
cal assassinations wrecked the nation. Not questioning the decision of the board was the paramount consideration they put forward, and the point on which they prevailed. This remained the case despite the fact that, a few months after their original Diablo Canyon decision, the board ratified a Club resolution calling for a moratorium on the construction of power plants sited on scenic coast. Rather than admit they had made a mistake in the Diablo decision, the board grandfathers that Diablo Canyon Nuclear Power Plant into the moratorium resolution, citing it as the one exception to their coastal power plant policy.

The Past is Present
Ultimately, the lesson for the Sierra Club from Diablo Canyon 1966-69 may have been the perils of acceptance of the status quo. We lost the battle the mo-
ment we accepted PG&E's framing of the issue. Where on the coast should we put the nuclear power plant?

In the present day, the fight over en-
ergy corridors—the insistence that large swaths must be cut out of national parks and other public lands to accom-
modate the transmission lines needed to carry clean (or dirty) power across long distances from central power plants—features much the same premise that PG&E set up for Diablo Canyon in 1966: We have an ever-expanding thirst for electricity that can only be met by this large, environmentally ruinous energy project, and not by conservation, en-
ergy efficiency, and decentralized power.

"It would appear," writes Ed Main-
deed to stuff the deserts, parks and wild-
tires in California suitable for PV

The inheritors of the philosophies of David Brower and Ansel Adams dwell in the house of an obviously stacked deck. If you're one of those folks, you should write a check to the utmost of your tax-
deductible ability and mail it in. If you know some of those folks who are not Sierra Club members, you need to show this to them and let them know just how important this is. Only this liti-
gation can save the Cayucos Viewshed. If the viewshed is to be saved, this action will move us closer to the endangered, and the general public, to step up and support the cost of our actions taken in the public interest. The Chapter has limited resources, and lawsuits and conservation cam-
paigns are not cheap. The national organization does not fund litigation by local Sierra Club chapters. When I say the Chapter stepped up on this issue, I mean they took a very big and very brave step, fully aware of the condition of the economy, with faith that the necessary support for this action would be there.

So please direct your attention to the most important item you'll see in the Santa Lucian this year: The coupon directly below. Several hundred people publicly testified on behalf of meaning-
ful protection for the Cayucos viewshed over the last several years. Many more concurred; many felt helpless in the face of an obviously stacked deck. If you’re one of those folks, you should write a check to the utmost of your tax-
deductible ability and mail it in. If you know some of those folks who are not Sierra Club members, you need to show this to them and let them know just how important this is. Only this liti-
gation can save the Cayucos Viewshed. If the viewshed is to be saved, this litigation must be able to go forward. Thank you for your support.

A Note from the Editor

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40 Years
continued from page 9

areas with new transmission corridors and new mega projects and expansive, but also the land it would give the farms 'where if we merely meet the already accepted efficiency and conservation goals of California, mankind is past of them won’t be needed.' Whatever happened to the California Energy Commission’s ‘load-
ning order?’ Whatever happened to CEQ’s finding that there are 5 billion square feet of existing commercial-building rooftops in California suitable for PV

In the four years that I have had the privilege of putting together the Santa Lucian for our members every month, I think the story I have been proudest to print is “Why We Sue.” As a member, this is the kind of thing I can point to and say “This is why I joined the Sierra Club. This is why the Sierra Club is needed.” As the Cayucos Viewshed fight dragged on, the Santa Lucia Chapter, like many other members of the public, wrote and testified in an effort to per-

TheSanta Lucia Chapter of the Sierra Club
recommends a vote for:

Lan Boldman
Jeremy Doochin
Jim Dougherty
Larry Fahn
Jerry Sutherland

The SLO Mothers for Peace and John Ashbaugh of the Santa Lucia Chapter invite you to enjoy the following group of useful and informative articles writing of this story. Many of the details of the Sierra Club’s struggle over Diablo Canyon in the period 1966-69 are drawn from the account in Conservation Fall-
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Classifieds

Next issue deadline is February 12.
To get a rate sheet or submit your ad and payment, contact:
Sierra Club - Santa Lucia Chapter
P.O. Box 1575
San Luis Obispo, CA 93406
sierrachelb@gmail.com

Local Government Meetings

City of SLO—1st & 3rd Tues., 7:00 p.m.;
781-7103

Arroyo Grande—2nd and 4th Tues., 7:00 p.m.;
473-5404

Atascadero—2nd & 4th Tues.;
466-8099

Cambria CSD—4th Thurs.;
927-6223

Grover Beach—1st & 3rd Mon., 6:30 p.m.;
473-5637

Grover Beach Planning Commission—
2nd Tues.

Morro Bay—2nd & 4th Mon.

Paso Robles—1st & 3rd Tues., 7:00 p.m.;
237-5888

Pismo Beach—1st Tues., 5:30 p.m.;
773-4657

Los Osos CSD board—1st Tues. & 2nd
Mon., varies

California Coastal Commission—3rd
Tues., varies

SLO County Board of Supervisors—
every Tues., 781-5450

SLO Council of Governments;
781-4219

SLOCOG Citizens Advisory Committee—
1st Wed. every other month, 6:00 p.m.

SLOCOG Board—1st Wed. every other month,
6:30 a.m.

Solar Cooking Workshop

Saturday, February 16, 2008, 11:00 to 1:00, Los Verdes Community Room, SLO.

Want to learn how easy it is to cook by the sun? And experience how it feels to use clean, free energy? Phyllis Davies and Rosemary Wilvert will demonstrate the versatility, economy, and taste appeal of solar cooking, followed by samples from among the vegetables, meats, breads, cakes, cookies and other foods they have solar-cooked for their families for many years.

$10 donation, to benefit the Sierra Club and cover costs. For reservations and directions to the Community Room at Los Verdes Estates Park II, please phone 544-8365. Carpooling is appreciated!

The California Climate Champions Program

Deadline to apply: February 11, 2008

Could you be one of California’s first-ever young Climate Champions? Could you help spread the word about climate change in your school or community, or even across the State and beyond?

Enter a competition where you will have a chance to become one of 20 Climate Champions for California. As a champion, you’ll get to participate in a range of activities, including a “climate camp,” where you will learn more about the issue and plan activities for your time “in office.” You might also get to take part in meetings in U.K. and Japan with other champions from around the world!

The California Climate Champions program, sponsored by the California Air Resources Board (www.arb.ca.gov) and the British Council (www.britishcouncil.org/usa), is one of a number of similar initiatives established in many countries around the world.

For further information on the California Climate Champions contact Annalisa Schilla at aschilla@arb.ca.gov or (916) 322-8514.
Outings and Activities Calendar

All of our hikes and activities are open to all Club members and the general public. 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 Leader Gary Felsman (473-3694). For information on a specific outing, please contact the outing leader. Outings Leaders please let your outings or events in by the 1st for the next month’s outings.

Hiking Classifications:
Distance: 1 = 0-2 mi., 2 = 3-5 mi., 3 = 6-9 mi., 4 = 10-12 mi., 5 = more.

Sat-Sun., Feb 2-3, Mecca Hills Camp: Join us as we explore the Mecca Hills Wilderness Area east of Indio, CA. While ATVs roar through the Algodones dunes to the south, we will walk quietly through the gravel washes and rocky hills to several well-known and scenic sites. Saturday we will visit Hidden Springs and the Grottos, and Sunday we will explore Painted Canyon. Carmel Valley will include the civilized amenities, potluck supper and campfire Saturday night. Limit 12 participants. Ldr: Craig Deutsche, deutsche@earthlink.net. (310-477-6670), CNRCC Desert Committee

Sunday, February 3rd, 8:00 a.m., Montaña de Oro Work Party: Come help California State Parks and the CCCMB. Maintain trails in the mountains near Smithers, British Columbia. Designed for groups and families. Easily accessible by air, road or rail, yet located in a true wilderness setting. Canoe, kayak, raft, bike, hike, fish, ski, or view the abundant wildlife. The Lodge accommodates up to 10 with 5 bedrooms and 2.5 baths. It’s like your own private wilderness area, but with all the comforts of home. Also great for retraites, seminars, courses or club outings. We can connect you to local outfitters, guides or instructors. Visit www.canyoncreekbritishcolumbia.com, email info@canyoncreekbritishcolumbia.com or call 250-847-4349 (Roger McColm). Mention this ad and 5% of your rental goes to the Santa Lucia Chapter.

Sat.-Sun., February 16-18, Southern Nevada Wilderness Service: Join Vicky Hoover on what’s become an annual event, helping the BLM’s Ely office take care of beautiful new desert wilderness areas in Lincoln County, northeast of Las Vegas. This scenic jaunt is to be in the Delamar, Meadow Valley or Mormon Mts. working on off-road vehicle damage restoration, wilderness cleanup or hand seeding for vegetation. Central commissary. Contact Vicky at vickyhoover@sierracclub.org or (415)977-5527, CNRCC Wilderness Committee.

Sat., Feb 10, 0930, SUN., BIKE NIPOOMO. Meet at Nipomo Library to tour Native Garden, new bike-trail, Creekside, Dana Adobe etc. Kids welcome. (no dogs) Confirm or information a few days before at <bdenneen@kcbx.net> or 929-3547.

Sat.-Mon., February 16-18, Valley Wilderness Backpack: This will be an easy to moderate journey to explore a little known area with Marty Dicken, wilderness resource specialist with the Ridgecrest office of the BLM. We will monitor 040 impacts, but our reward will be the washes, low hills, and open grassland views in early spring. At these low elevations in the Mojave, wildflowers are possible, and rain is unlikely. Carry all water. Limit 12. Leader: Craig Deutsche. (310-477-6670), deutsche@earthlink.net, CNRCC Desert Committee.

Sat.-Sun., March 1-2, Grass Valley Wilderness Backpack: This will be an easy to moderate journey to explore a little known area with Marty Dicken, wilderness resource specialist with the Ridgecrest office of the BLM. We will monitor 040 impacts, but our reward will be the washes, low hills, and open grassland views in early spring. At these low elevations in the Mojave, wildflowers are possible, and rain is unlikely. Carry all water. Limit 12. Leader: Craig Deutsche. (310-477-6670), deutsche@earthlink.net, CNRCC Desert Committee.

Sat.-Sun., March 15-16, Ghost Town Extravaganza: Come with us to this spectacular desert landscape near Death Valley to explore the ruins of California’s colorful past. Camp at the historic ghost town of Ballarat (flush toilets & hot showers). On Sat., do a very challenging hike to ghost town Lookout City with expert Hal Fowler who will regale us with tales of this wild west town. Later we’ll return to camp for Happy Hour, a potluck feast and campfire. On Sun, a quick visit to the infamous Riley town site before heading home. Group size strictly limited. Send $8 per person (Sierra Club) 2, sase, &W phones, email, include fee for leadership, info to Lisa Engstrand, P.O. Box 294726, Phelan, CA 92329, (760) 888-2179. Co-leader: Don Peterson (760) 375-8599 CNRCC/Desert Committee

Wed., March 19th, 26th 5:30 p.m. Informal Hikes Return. See website, or e-mail Gary Felsman for details. E-mail is located on the Website.

WMI WILDERNESS FIRST AID AND WILDERNESS FIRST RESPONDER RECERTIFICATION COURSE

Sponsored by the Wilderness Medicine Institute of NOLS and ASI Poly Escapes

DATES: February 22-25

COST: Students: $125 Tuition Only
Non-Students: $185 Tuition Only

LOCATION: Cal Poly State University, San Luis Obispo
University Union, #220

PHONE: Poly Escapes, 756-1287

EMAIL: polyescapes@calpoly.edu

WEB: www.asi.calpoly.edu/poly_escapes_trips/get_active

Past paced and hands-on, this two- or three-day course covers a wide range of wilderness medicine topics for people who travel in the outdoors. WMI’s curriculum is unique and includes many advanced topics that other programs leave out...dislocation reduction, focused spinal assessment and epinephrine administration. In just two days, you’ll gain the knowledge, skills and ability to make sound decisions in emergency situations. This course is ideal for trip leaders, camp staff, outdoor enthusiasts and individuals in remote locations. WMI’s course is pre-approved by the American Camping Association, the United States Forest Service, and other governmental agencies. This course does not include CPR. Call for WFR certification requirements.

Island Hopping in Channel Islands National Park

Six Sierra Club California Fundraising Cruises Scheduled for 2008

February 9-11, 3 islands ($475)
April 4-7, May 2-5, July 18-21, 4 islands ($775)
August 23-27, September 13-17, 5 islands ($925)

Explore the wild, windswept islands of Channel Islands National Park. In spring the islands are ablaze with wildflowers. In summer, the pristine waters of the Marine Sanctuary entice snorkelers, sailing and kayakers. All year long, enjoy unusual plants and flowers, seals and sea lions, sea and land birds.

All cruises depart from Santa Barbara aboard the 68’ twin diesel her. Fee includes an assigned bunk, all meals, snacks, beverages, plus the services of a ranger/naturalist who will travel with us to lead hikes on each island and point out interesting features.

To make a reservation mail a $100 deposit payable to Sierra Club to leader: Joan Jones Holtz, 11826 The Wye St., El Monte, CA 91732. Contact leader for more information (626-443-0706; jholtz@sierravol.com)

Looking for a real wilderness vacation? Come rent Canyon Creek Lodge.

In the mountains near Smithers, British Columbia. Designed for groups and families. Easily accessible by air, road or rail, yet located in a true wilderness setting. Canoe, kayak, raft, bike, hike, fish, ski, or view the abundant wildlife. The Lodge accommodates up to 10 with 5 bedrooms and 2.5 baths. It’s like your own private wilderness area, but with all the comforts of home. Also great for retraites, seminars, courses or club outings. We can connect you to local outfitters, guides or instructors. Visit www.canyoncreekbritishcolumbia.com, email info@canyoncreekbritishcolumbia.com or call 250-847-4349 (Roger McColm). Mention this ad and 5% of your rental goes to the Santa Lucia Chapter.

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