Sierra Club & U.S. Green Building Council Launch “Green Buildings for Cool Cities”

The Sierra Club’s Cool Cities program and the U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC) have launched the Green Buildings for Cool Cities collaboration.

The partnership will leverage Cool Cities’ more than 200 local campaigns and USGBC’s national network of 78 chapters to encourage new and retrofitted energy-efficient buildings, a key solution to global warming and to achieving the transition to a clean energy economy. Our step-by-step green building policy guide for communities of all sizes features policies ranging from basic to more advanced plans of action to address energy-efficiency and environmental sustainability through the built environment.

Highlighted policies include leadership standards for government buildings that serve as models for the community; financial and no-cost incentives to build green for the commercial and residential sectors; improved minimum efficiency standards through energy code adoption and enforcement. The Green Buildings for Cool Cities policy guide is available online at www.coolcities.us and www.usgbc.org.

“Because buildings contribute nearly 40% of global warming emissions and consume over 70% of electricity use in the United States, increasing the energy performance of our homes and businesses is a cost-effective clean energy solution to global warming, and an enormous opportunity for rebuilding our economy,” said Glen Brand, Sierra Club’s Cool Cities Program Director.

“Local governments have long been laboratories of innovation when it comes to energy-efficiency, proving by example that sustainable building practices can be effectively brought to scale. USGBC is pleased to be part of this important new effort,” said 2009 AIA President and USGBC Board Chair,妙禽

Los Osos: Let’s Get It Right

Coastal Commission steps in to oversee sewer saga

On January 14, the Los Osos Wastewater Project arrived at a watershed moment.

At a “Substantial Issue” hearing of the California Coastal Commission held at Huntington Beach city hall, the appeals and testimony of environmental groups and community activists won the day over County officials and a sizeable “just do it” contingent, who sought to assure the Commission that all issues surrounding the sewer plan had been resolved.

The Commission was persuaded otherwise, and decided to take on the issues at a full hearing a few months hence. At that time, the Commission will examine the degree to which the project is protective of wetlands as defined and required by the California Coastal Act, how treated effluent will be distributed to assure the biological integrity of creeks and habitat, how the project will mitigate the environmental damage done by the sewer’s false start several years ago, and how the County will go about disposing of five million tons of septage from abandoned septic tanks.

Most crucially, appellants persuaded the Commission to look into the County’s plans for water conservation and the agricultural re-use of treated effluent – the heart of the project – and take over the oversight and approval of those programs in order to assure their success.

County officials tried to minimize the day’s outcome by characterizing the substantial issues identified by appellants and the Coastal Commission as minor details. But there’s a reason why such proceedings are called Substantial Issue hearings, not Minor Detail hearings. It was clear from its staff report that the last thing in the world the Coastal Commission wanted to do was take responsibility for the Los Osos sewer, and would take on that role only if absolutely necessary. By the end of the long day, a majority of Commissioners concluded that it was absolutely necessary.

Prior to the hearing, the County attempted to pressure the Sierra Club into withdrawing our appeal – part of a lobbying blitz in which County...
Cambria Activists & Mercury Put Desal Plan in Retrograde

By Lynne Harkins

Another attempt to diminish CEQA in the County meets determined, successful opposition

Cambria residents mark off the proposed locations of test wells for the desal plant.

It’s time for America to get serious about energy and be less dependent on dwindling oil reserves. We need to increase our use of clean, renewable energy sources like wind and solar power.

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I first really got to know Annie during the Hearst Ranch land-use battle in the mid-nineties. Since then, I had the pleasure (and the pain) of working with her on many issues and campaigns. What I loved about her is that she always ‘got it’; she always was able to see through the smoke and mirrors into the core of an issue. She never fell into the trap of compromising herself or her values in order to seem reasonable. Annie always fought tirelessly for what was right, regardless of whether it was popular; and people loved her for it. Annie passed from this world with her soul intact, surrounded by family, friends, and a grateful community.

Pat Veesart

Our Annie

Anne McMahon died of cancer on December 19. She was an environmental champion of California’s central coast, so much so that it would be impossible to fully put into words just how much she contributed to the preservation of the land we love, but herein some of her friends give it a try.

It’s hard to quantify how much value Anne McMahon was to me. A litany of her accomplishments – impressive and extensive as they are – would not have come close to capturing Anne for me. She was so much more than what her public accomplishments would reveal. She was always ready to mentor and advise and share her knowledge but more than that, she was always ready to listen, to sympathize, to laugh about the absurdities of life. And always ready to push the work needed to succeed. I was always mindful when seeking help, not to overburden her – she never said no, no matter how difficult the job. She was dedicated and loyal and never compromised her beliefs. The quote from E.B. White when she used as her tag line on all her emails expressed well, “I would like to believe that the world is a little bit brighter about a bright future for man if I spent less time proving that he can outwit nature more and more by wasting her sweetness and respecting her beauty.”

-Sue Harvey

I had the absolute joy and delight of working with Anne McMahon at The Nature Conservancy when the local chapter of TNC was alive and well on the Central Coast. Those were the days when giant leaps in local environmental effort were made with projects that were ambitious and courageous and somewhat forbidding, but with Anne’s help the impossible became possible. We celebrated the the possibilities of The Carrizo Plain National Monument, the conservation success of SLO’s “Irish Hills” and the protection of the last stand of native Monterey pines in Cambria. These were victories, celebrations, perpetual gifts to the community, many members of which don’t know the names of the people behind these giant leaps in environmental success that they enjoy today. Anne was the backbone of such accomplishments, and they stand as a model of her and her efforts. The love and the dedication that this woman has had for her community is immeasurable.

On a personal level, Annie was a riddle to me. She seemed to balance a demanding and hectic professional career and a peaceful and nurturing family life with ease. She navigated through the turbulent diplomatic tidal waves of working with her graceful negotiation skills and balanced it all with a sharp wit and a sense of humor. I admired her for her levity and her resolve when the outcome wasn’t what she had hoped for. This and many other wonderful qualities made Jennie who she was. I’ll always and forever be changed because Annie taught me to walk through a rainstorm as though it was sunshine on my shoulders and look forward to warmer days ahead.

-Laurin Hayes

Anne was the first friend I made when I moved to San Luis Obispo County in 1994. We were working together as reporters at the Country News, and I was pretty unsettled about leaving my wonderful community on Kauai and moving here where I didn’t know a soul. As I was a “newbie,” Annie helped me understand the context of the local stories I was covering. She knew the players were, what the deep background was. She covered the Santa Margarita Ranch forever and more. I remember well when the Robertsons still owned the ranch and I occasionally helped with some aspect of the reporting. It opened my eyes to the way that power and money corrupt the public planning process, and how easily elected officials are manipulated by developers with millions of dollars at stake in their more moribund real estate dreams. It was the beginning of an education process that continues to this day.

She was a relentless advocate for biodiversity, agricultural preservation, and local, sustainable food systems. I’m sure she was at frequent places where many other environmentalist feared to tread—where it could get hot, the subtleties of land use, the bureaucratic roadblocks to getting the USDA to certify a mobile slaughtering operation, which sounds a little gruesome, but is an important tool that allows ranchers and small-scale meat producers to market their product directly, as opposed to selling (virtually at a loss) to industrial-scale feedlots that are at the mercy of the four corporations who now control 90% of the slaughter houses in the country. It took years of advocacy, but she finally succeeded. She was a founding member of the Central Coast Ag Network, wrote the grant that got it off the ground, shaped its organizational structure and did much of the media outreach behind its popular “Central Coast Crown” campaign. She hosted the Environmental seal for the Agricultural Liaison Advisory Board (ALAB), a committee heavily, but not exclusively, stocked with traditional ag and ranching types who have little sympathy for all that enviro fol-de-rol. Her current passion was the creation of an “Agricultural and Open Space District” that would provide a source of funds to purchase critical lands valuable to development, and protect them through easements or public ownership. When ALAB proved unwilling to endorse such a move, she simply went around them and contacted the ag community directly, selling the idea to ag leaders, county planners, elected officials and environmentalists and forming a steering committee to move the idea forward.

The Planning Commission has now officially endorsed the idea by including it in the Conservation and Open Space Element, and it will be up to the Board to get behind the idea and put it on the ballot. The creation of such a district would be a fitting, lasting legacy to Anne’s life’s work.

I will always respect Annie for her sense of integrity and principled stands on environmental issues. She was pragmatic and able to compromise so long as the solutions did not compromise away the underlying values. This is always the more difficult road to take as an activist. For instance, while she was a warrior who often doubled as a general in the fights to protect the Hearst Ranch and the Santa Margarita Ranch from development, she was adamantly opposed to the “conservation easements” proposed for both of those properties because they allowed far too much development, and did not go far enough to provide public access and protect the natural resources that she and others were fighting to conserve.

For this she was branded an “extremist,” primarily by people who did not take the time to read those documents or did not understand their implications. But she was also a staunch supporter of conservation easements that were truly protective of open space, habitat, and sustainable ag production.

The two landscapes I will always associate with Annie are the Santa Margarita Ranch and the Carrizo Plain. She fought two very different battles to save them both. Saving extraordinary landscapes from the pressures of development is a long-term engagement. It takes endurance and tenacity to follow them all the way through the twists and turns of environmental review, political maneuvering, regulatory approval and litigation. And while the final scene has not been written on either property, Annie was on the front lines of both battles every step of the way. She brought people together, networked like a champ, and forged important connections between people who are working together for common goals. She had an ability to find the very best people, get them all in the same room, and trust that the creative synergy would blossom into a plan of action.

Her environmental advocacy propelled her political activism. She was a tireless campaigner and served on the core committees for David Blakely, Kat McConnell and Jim Patterson. Through her volunteer campaigns, she experienced first-hand a model of grassroots campaign strategy that changed the face of local elections forever. Annie was the bridge between the old, “yard signs and leaflets” style local grassroots campaign, and the sophisticated, high-tech, “targeted voter universe” style campaign used by the big boys that has turned the political tide in SLO county. Annie first introduced us to that strategy in David Blakely’s 2008 campaign, and although we did not prevail that year it was successfully re-deployed in 2004 to elect Jim Patterson and in 2008 to elect Adam Hill.

And lastly, I will be forever grateful for her personal loyalty. Her last “public” act, less than two weeks before she died, was to join the environmental leaders who met with Supervisor Thompson to urge him to retain me on the Planning Commission. While I knew she was motivated in part by our friendship, what she was really advocating for was the need to protect the environment through enlightened land use planning, a passion she carried with her to the end.

I will always associate with Annie her determination to expand her precious, dwindling energy at that
Climate Clowning with Meg and Carly

California’s Republican gubernatorial and senatorial candidates are making a bold bid to reverse the progress made in clean energy and climate change mitigation measures.

Both Meg Whitman and Carly Fiorina are promising California voters a return to the nineteenth century, albeit a much hotter version of the 19th century, marked by monster storms, widespread drought and tropical disease, flooded coastal cities and dead oceans — if the people of California elect Whitman and Fiorina to the Senate or governorship.

To be fair, they are merely upholding a tradition of the California Republican party. Before signing into law the landmark Assembly Bill 32, the Governor Schwarzenegger observed that “The figures people tend to cite don’t seem to reflect our climate change and efficiency measures that are easily available. And they don’t look at the cost of inaction, which is the extinction of the human race.”

But Whitman and Fiorina are even more wrong than that piece of common sense suggests. Combating climate change will not make the state the candidate. It represents the only possibility for a viable economy.

We refer the candidates to a new report from University of California researchers examining the economic impact of putting AB 32 on hold. “Energy Prices and California’s Economic Security,” sponsored by Next 10, a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization, finds that if California remains primarily dependent upon fossil fuels, private electricity costs could escalate as much as 33 percent. Using price forecasts from the U.S. Department of Energy’s Annual Energy Outlook (AEO), the study estimates that without diversifying California’s energy portfolio toward more renewable fuels and energy efficiency, the state risks a loss of over $80 billion in Gross State Product (GSP) and more than a half million jobs by 2020. Implementing 33 percent renewable energy, combined with 1 percent annual improvement in energy efficiency, the other hand, lifts a load off California’s economy from higher energy prices and yields a growth dividend, increasing GSP by $24 billion and generating 112,000 jobs.

To date, official and unofficial economic assessments of state policies have been informed by relatively outdated fossil fuel price trend estimates. Unlike any previous study on the impacts of California’s climate policies, this study uses up-to-date U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) fossil fuel projections. “The global financial crisis has hit hard in California, where unemployment, mortgage foreclosures and an unprecedented state budget deficit are among the highest in the nation. But the current decline in demand in global energy markets is temporary and risks lulling policymakers and the public into a state of denial about long-term fossil fuel price trends,” said the report’s author, UC Berkeley professor David Roland-Holst. “Even taking conservative official estimates, we find that California risks far greater economic peril by remaining heavily dependent upon oil. Energy efficiency and renewables offer a viable hedge against the risks of higher energy prices. Over the last six months, even as national and state unemployment remains figures climb, retail U.S. gasoline prices have risen 40 percent and crude oil prices have risen 60 percent. While looking for work, California’s motorists are already paying half a billion dollars a day more to drive than consider overlook- ing those issues just so the sewer could get built sooner.”

Commis’s economic growth prospect pointedly noted pointedly that “our staff has not been able to respond clearly to questions raised here.” Commissioner

Sara Wan cited “serious deficiencies” in the Environmental Impact Report and said that the restoration of the project’s proposed disposal culvert site, which is proposed as mitigation for the project’s destruction of habitat, had already been designated as mitigated by the department’s finding of “no substantial issue” and that deferring the resolution of this project until an unspecified later date was not acceptable. This is the time to resolve this issue,” she said.

She also noted that, as currently worded, there is no way to enforce the implementation of the project’s water conservation and agricultural reuse programs.

“This is a textbook example of environmental activism at its best,” said Santa Lucia Chapter Chair Mol. March 2010 of the hearing’s outcome. “Our congratulations and thanks to the Coastal Commission for acknowledging the problems pointed out to them and moving to correct them, despite the enormous pressure on them to do otherwise.”

What they worry? Whitman and Fiorina.

On January 11, a bill introduced by Republicans in the state Assembly to overturn AB 32 was rejected. Its sponsors immediately set about turning it into a ballot initiative.

“When it comes to climate change, the most expensive thing we can do is nothing and the second most expensive option is to delay action,” said Sen. Nottbohm. California Advocacy Director for the Natural Resources Defense Council. “The annual economic damage caused by reduced carbon emissions and the savings in energy costs that the bill would eliminate would amount to $11.6 billion annually. Overall, $21 billion in energy assets are at risk.”

Whitman and Fiorina ignore all this. As the Daily Beast poetically observed, the policy of so-called Silicon Valley Republicans is making perhaps the biggest, most consequential gamble of anyone in the country.”

We’ll be more blunt: Meg Whitman and Carly Fiorina are California’s climate clowns, running for election on a promise to destroy our economy all the way over the cliff, en route to helping bring about the end of life as we know it.
A Squeaker for San Miguel

By Sue Harvey

On December 8, the County Supervisors rendered a long awaited vote on the San Miguel Ranch development—the county’s 550 acres of valuable ag land hanging in the balance.

Would a General Plan Amendment (GPA) be granted, turning the land into a sprawling subdivision, or would it be retained as a viable ag and agricultural parcel?

The authorization to process a zoning change was initiated in June 2005 by a Board of Supervisors ideologically 180 degrees from the current Board. Still, it was widely speculated that Supervisor Patterson might vote to approve the GPA.

The Environmental Impact Report that accompanied the project cited numerous inconsistencies with county policies and goals and 21 Class I impacts—serious, unavoidable and cannot be mitigated. County staff had recommended denial of the project. On a 5-0 vote, the Planning Commission voted to recommend to the Board that the GPA be denied.

Central to the question of expanding the San Miguel development onto the Ag land on the west side of Highway 101, where very little development has occurred due to access constraints, was the question continued on page 9

“Best Practices” Website Launched

First-in-nation project designed to expedite the greening of America

Green Cities California (GCC), a collaborative of ten of the state’s most environmentally progressive jurisdictions, has launched a Best Practices website. The purpose of the first-of-its-kind Web site is to energize the implementation of sound environmental policies in cities and counties around the state and, ultimately, the country, by providing access to a storehouse of cutting-edge environmental policy that can accelerate policy implementation by helping cities avoid pitfalls and save time.

Local sustainability policies can have a profound and positive impact on environmental protection. California experienced a dramatic drop in littered polystyrene on beaches due to the adoption of polystyrene bans by dozens of coastal jurisdictions in the state. However, the development of such legislation is exceedingly time-consuming and many cities, particularly small cities, don’t have the resources to develop policies on their own.

“Our Best Practices Web site addresses that problem by providing a central repository of information with easily downloadable policy documents and staff reports,” says GCC Coordinator Carol Messaline. “Now any jurisdiction can benefit from the hard work completed by other jurisdictions, and simply modify the policy to suit their locale.”

“This collaborative effort will save communities staff time and money by providing the resources required for change, eliminating the need for individual cities to constantly reinvent the wheel,” said Dean Kuhn, director of the San Diego County Department of Environmental Health and Water – can be accessed now at www.greencitiescalifornia.org.

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Why Water Rules
You need to know about the Master Water Plan

By Eric Greening

A dizzying array of important County plans is in progress, or soon to be: the Conservation and Open Space Element, the Climate Action Plan, the Land Use and Circulation Element/Rural Areas Plan, the Regional Transportation Plan, and others.

One plan that is lurking outside the current focus but is at least equally important is the update of the Master Water Plan. Its relative obscurity largely results from the fact that the County Water Resources Advisory Committee is not on television like the Planning Commission, County Council of Governments, and Board of Supervisors, but WRAC meetings are open to the public, and could benefit from robust public attendance and participation.

The WRAC recently received a presentation on the work in progress. This should soon take the form of a written draft, which can be found at www.SLOCountyWater.org. Said draft will be open for comments.

Here are a few things to look for.

You will notice that the County is divided into 16 water planning areas. Since one justification given for the abandonment of the 19 regional Planning Areas in the update of the Land Use and Circulation Element (LUCES) is the WRAC recommendation that planning be shifted to a watershed basis, it is important to note that there is a large difference between the 16 areas in the Draft Master Water Plan and the 5 areas in the LUCES. That said, there still may be some adjustment needed in the areas defined in the Master Water Plan. The current lines are not just based on watersheds; they sometimes define underground basins, or even areas where current purveyors provide service. In a watershed-based map, the Salinas River would not be crossed by four boundary lines in its journey from headwaters to the Monterey County Line. There needs to be public discussion about whether areas should be defined solely by watershed, or whether a hybrid system can be justified.

In addition to the map, the parts of the draft completed to date include a water supply inventory and summary of available information about demand, and “a demand methodology,” including “Criteria for Asserting a Water Resource Shortfall” and “Criteria for Evaluating Potential Water Supply Solutions.” An important issue with the latter is to make investments in green buildings pay dividends, on average resulting in 6.6% improvement on returns on investment, 8% reduction in operating costs, and a 7.5% increase in building value. Improving the energy performance in existing buildings can reduce energy use by as much as 30% or 40%, with the ability to earn back those investments through lower utility bills over time.

Green building will support 7.9 million U.S. jobs and pump $554 billion into the American economy—including $396 billion in wages—over the next four years (2009-2013), according to a 2009 study by the USGBC and Booz Allen Hamilton. LEED is the internationally recognized green building certification system developed by the USGBC. LEED provides third-party verification that a building or community was designed and built using strategies aimed at improving performance across all the metrics that matter most: energy savings, water efficiency, CO2 emissions reduction, improved indoor environmental quality, stewardship of natural resources and sensitivity to their impacts.

In recent years, thousands of buildings in the United States have achieved LEED certification. As of October 2009, more than 200 localities across the U.S. are recognizing LEED as an effective tool for benchmarking the performance of their green building policies, and 2,965 local government projects are pursuing LEED certification.

For more information on the Green Buildings for Cool Cities project, see www.coolcities.us and www.usgbc.org.
Our New Farmers

by Anastasia Killham

The Cal Poly Organic Farm (CPOF) generates more than fresh produce; it grows future farmers who put their agricultural skills to the test on the commercial market.

At the head of the group is '05 graduate John DeRosier, who currently leases 100 acres in areas throughout San Luis Obispo County. While achieving a bachelor's degree in}

Soil Science, DeRosier worked at the Farm as Production Manager. He volunteered numerous hours to various farm projects and started a biointensive garden, a methodology that "looks at the farm as a whole, living organism over individual parts." DeRosier is known within the CPOF community for his success as a dry farmer in areas with as little as 4 inches of annual rainfall. "A dry farmer" is someone who uses natural rainfall to grow their crops,” explained DeRosier who employs crop rotation and cover cropping to increase soil fertility and retain soil moisture.

He also gained experience in the production and marketing sides of an agricultural operation through the CPOF’s Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) Program, farmers’ market and restaurant sales, working with a wide variety of equipment and interacting with community members, growers and students at the university's organic farm, compost unit and machine shop.

He recently completed his first year of operating a 20-member “grain CSA” -- the first in this area -- featuring bi-weekly shares and plans to feature over 20 different kinds of wheat along with a more exclusive, smaller member share with grains including oats, rye, spelt, millet, quinoa, amaranth and various wheat varieties. In addition to the CSA, DeRosier will soon be selling his grains at local farmers’ markets and has started a customer interest list. More information is available online at www.withthegrain.org.

"Once people eat good grains, they don’t go back," said DeRosier. Following in DeRosier's footsteps is Templeton native and Cal Poly graduate Kyle Cosgrove, who rents five acres in his home town. Three of his five acres are in production with various vegetables and flowers.

Cosgrove also experiments with growing beer hops "in hopes of supplying a family micro brew down the road." He has two brothers who plan to collaborate on the project, one to head up beer making and the other, also a Cal Poly graduate, to direct sales and marketing.

Cosgrove graduated last spring from Cal Poly with a degree in Plant Protection Sciences. While attending Cal Poly, Cosgrove discovered the CPOF and enrolled in the Organic Enterprise Course. He went on to attain paid employment first as a harvest worker and later on as harvest supervisor. The income from the Farm supplements his personal venture as an independent farmer.

“Right now, I’m just seeing what works and that entails doing a lot of different things,” he said. His biggest challenge is fending off an abundant deer population. Next on his list is a short water supply, which has spurred him to focus on less consumptive growing methods and plant varieties.

Fellow CPOF alum Roger Tompkins, who will be graduating this spring with a degree in Environmental Management and Protection, also has returned to his home town to put his farming skills to the test. With ½ acre of family-owned land in production in Atascadero, he is also experimenting with numerous varieties and has a target market in mind. He successfully completed the Organic Enterprise Course and got a feel for what ingredients would be particularly useful to grow. Tompkins creates recipes that incorporate ingredients he is able to grow in abundance. The restaurant saves vegetable scraps for compost, which is then used to amend the soil.

Tompkins hopes to "just get established" in his first year of farm operations, improve soil fertility and ideally make some of his money back.

"In the long term he would "love to farm as a career and to be able to survive off the proceeds.""

The Cal Poly Organic Farm reaches out to over 200 students annually through formal coursework, paid employment and volunteer opportunities. All farm supporters contribute in various ways to the operation of the diversified, 11-acre, certified organic farm, which, along with an amazing array of vegetable varieties, is home to a small flock of chickens, a growing worm population and one known feline mouser.

For more information about the Cal Poly Organic Farm and related opportunities, please visit: www.calpolyorganicfarm.com. Email orgfarm@calpoly.edu or call 805-756-6139.

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Dogs Get It Done

The Nipomo Creek Dogs Ralph Bishop and Dan Diaz.

After years of going to every conceivable regulatory agency, talking with staff, testifying at meetings, preparing photo-documentation and conducting site tours, the Nipomo Creek Dogs -- aka Ralph Bishop and Dan Diaz -- have secured a future for their beloved creek, long beleaguered by agricultural waste (i.e. discarded nitrate laden irrigation tubing).

Last December, Regional Water Board staff told the Dogs they are evaluating the express prohibition of discharge of “agricultural rubbishes” into surface waters or any potential point of contact, and are requiring “responsible parties” on Nipomo Creek to identify actions being taken to prevent further discharges of agricultural waste, as well as to address the potential impact of waste currently in place.

Ralph and Dan are examples of what intimate, knowledge of and love for a special place can accomplish.
Peerless Leaders

Sierra Club Outings are about maintaining and enhancing a diversified, volunteer-run outings program that supports the Sierra Club's conservation mission by connecting people with the natural world and with the Club. After you've been on a few Sierra Club hikes, you may feel a yen to become a volunteer Sierra Club Outings Leader.

"One leader was recently heard to extol the benefits of leading trips: 'You can go wherever you want, with whom you want, at the pace you want.'" says Will McWhinney, Angeles Chapter Outings Committee Chair. "Another once told me she was gaining leadership skills and confidence that applied to her professional life. Others have felt fulfillment from sharing their wilderness experience with others. Beyond the personal benefits of leading there are many benefits that leadership brings to others. Without leaders, many people are too shy to venture into the forests or onto the mountains. Without leaders, no one would know when to show up for a group activity, or how to get there. Without leaders, there would be no outings."

Sierra Club outings are open to all.

Solar Cheating

Utility-scale solar power plants? Sure. The distributed generation of small-scale clean energy? You bet. What's needed to make both these competing models of alternative power generation happen get the right way? The policies that create a level playing field. Where direction is the pressure coming from to thwart that goal, while simultaneously claiming that rooftop solar can't cut it? Guess. Let's take a look at the political reality of distributed generation in California, and the entity that seems to like it least:

- PG&E opposed AB 920 (Huffman) which would require utility companies to pay customers for any excess electricity produced by their residential systems. Fortunately, Governor Schwarzenegger signed AB 920 despite PG&E's opposition, which means residents who install solar panels will no longer have to give their excess electricity away to PG&E for free.

- PG&E also opposes AB 560 (Skinner) which would allow the state's net metering cap from 2.5% to 5%. Under existing law, utilities have to allow customers who install solar arrays "tie into the grid," allowing them to essentially run their meters backwards and reduce or eliminate their utility bills. But this only applies to the first 2.5% of customers who sign up to take advantage of the policy. PG&E's customer service area is about a year away from hitting the cap. AB 560 would raise the ceiling on the program to 5%, which is particularly needed now that AB 920 will be adding additional incentive to install rooftop solar. But PG&E and all the other IOUs oppose the bill.

- PG&E also opposed SB 14 (Simitian) which would have, among other things, increased the state's renewable energy target from 20% to 33% by year 2020, and would have prevented utilities from taking credit for power generated by large hydroelectric dams in Canada. Unfortunately, the Governor vetoed SB 14, missing an opportunity to increase California's renewable energy potential.

Let's Make Power Local

On February 9, the County Board of Supervisors will review the work of the Planning Commission in the monumental chapter-by-chapter review and update of the county's two-decades-old Conservation and Open Space Element (COSE).

Improvements could be made, of course. As far as the Planning Commission's draft of the Energy chapter of the COSE is concerned, those can be summed up in four words: Make local power easier. That's because the new language in the draft Energy chapter makes it clear that the County encourages the local production of renewable energy, consumed as close as possible to the point of production. This is the definition of "distributed generation," which entails numerous small generators of clean, renewable power, feeding into the grid. It avoids "line loss" -- the 15 percent energy loss over long transmission lines from remote power plants -- and avoids environmental impacts by encouraging "dual use," i.e. a solar array added to an existing structure. It also makes possible a great deal of control over energy use and pricing to individuals and local governments.

This, inevitably, equates to control taken away from large, investor-owned utilities. So it isn't hard to imagine who would have a problem with the County championing local power in its new Conservation and Open Space Element.

The number of rooftop solar panels installed in the U.S. jumped more than 60 percent between 2007 and 2008. In California, that jump was 95 percent. As a result, last year rooftop solar panels put 10 times as much new energy into the grid as the utilities did. These are some of the eye-opening statistics you can learn from the article "Taking a Dim View of Solar Energy," on Newsweek's website. The title refers to the lengths utilities have gone to in their efforts to short-circuit rooftop solar.

In October, the governor signed a bill that will finally make it possible for Californians who own solar panels or backyard wind turbines to get paid for the excess energy they feed into the grid. It's a baby step, but it's the kind of policy that made Germany -- cloudy, overcast Germany -- into the world's powerhouse.

The new report "In Our Backyard: How to Increase Renewable Energy Production on Big Buildings and Other Local Spaces," a collaboration between UCLA and UC Berkeley law schools, underscores the point. As reported by UCLA Newsroom, "California has focused too much attention on long-term efforts to build large-scale and remote renewable energy facilities, including central solar and wind plants. These projects are usually located far from most energy consumers and face significant use and related hurdles that take years to resolve.

California's natural resources could make us "a world leader in renewable energy production just by focusing on the opportunities that exist on big buildings and public spaces in our own backyards," says the report's primary author Ethan Ellkind, Bank of America Climate Change Research Fellow at UCLA Law and Berkeley Law.

This is the future. The County's land use and energy policies can be written in such a way that they ensure either that San Luis Obispo is part of that future or that we are left behind. The COSE is the document that will guide the ways the county uses land, water and energy for the next twenty years. It needs to look ahead. And in looking ahead, it can plan energy and climate change, localized power is clearly a winning bet.

If the County wants to make sure the County puts its (meaning your) money down on the right bet, it would be a very good idea for you to show up to the meeting. The County Government Center on Feb. 9 when the Supervisors review the Conservation and Open Space Element. Tell them to keep local power in the COSE and in the county. Because you can guess who's telling them not to. (See "Solar Cheating," left.)
Taking Issue

problematic environmental coverage & commentary in our local media

Summary: Only 24 hours separate November 24th and November 25th, but twenty-two years came between 1987 and 2009. In 1987, controversy shook the county over the ramifications of the Hosgri fault found near the Diablo Canyon reactor; in 2009 controversy surrounds PG&E’s application to relicense the plant for 20 more years in spite of state requirements to first study the newly discovered Shoreline fault. The more things change, the more they seem to stay the same...

Foot-dragging on seismic issues seems to be the order of the day at PG&E. In their 2009 IEPR Report, the California Energy Commission noted, “For example, the CPUC required PG&E to submit an application by June 30, 2011, on whether renewing Diablo Canyon’s operating license is cost-effective and in the best interest of PG&E’s ratepayers. PG&E continues to object to a CPUC review of Diablo Canyon seismic studies as part of a license renewal review, and its current schedule would in fact not allow time for this review. PG&E is required to submit its license renewal feasibility assessment to the CPUC by June 30, 2011, but does not expect to complete updates to the seismic hazard model and the seismic vulnerability assessment until 2012 and 2013, respectively.” Given that ignoring the seismic hazard of the Hosgri fault ended up costing ratepayers billions in 2007 and 2008, the CPUC wants answers before deciding on whether to allow PG&E to proceed with license renewal.

New names; same concerns. Today, the Alliance for Nuclear Responsibility is spearheading the same effort to make PG&E answer seismic questions. PG&E’s premature relicensing application to the NRC is filled with wiggle words: buried in the application are.nces to the new Shoreline fault: “...preliminary results from ongoing studies by PG&E...” and “PG&E informed the NRC staff that it had performed an initial evaluation...” and “The NRC staff undertook a preliminary independent review...”. These vocabulary choices don’t offer much of a basis for making a decision, but that hasn’t stopped PG&E from steamrolling ahead with their plans.

There is much less chance of such a review happening today. According to a draft of the NRC’s new Generic Environmental Statement for license renewal, seismic issues are lumped into a generic “one-size-fits-all” category and are no longer site specific. In more than 50 previous license renewal cases, the NRC has accepted no new seismic issues for discussion, and has approved every single application.

The PUC staff recommendation that PG&E eat the $4 billion in earthquake retrofit blunders was overruled by the Commissioners. Utility customers have been paying for these seismic mistakes ever since. Can cash-strapped California residents afford to ignore seismic issues and let this happen again?

The PUC’s public staff, appointed to represent consumer interests, has recommended the company be forced to absorb $4.4 billion of the costs, saying PG&E management caused construction delays and cost over-runs that should not be charged to the public.

In 2007 the CPUC gave PG&E about $17 million in ratepayer money to study license renewal, not to apply. What the CPUC actually said in their 2007 decision was: “We will require PG&E to submit no later than June 30, 2011, an application on whether to pursue license renewal.

As stated previously, it is our intent that the proceeding in 2011 will result in a decision on whether to pursue license renewal based on the seismic question. This and other matters, considered at the听证会, will be the sole basis for a decision on whether to issue a new Diablo Canyon license.

Such applications for renewal appear to be standard industry practice, however the state Public Utilities Commission had given the energy provider until June 2011 to make a decision on what can be a multiyear process.

Upshot: PG&E seems to be operating under the theory of “apply first; ask questions later,” and believes that by hiding under the dark coattails of the federal Nuclear Regulatory Commission, they can fool Californians into believing that our state’s pertinent and pressing questions can be ignored. As history has shown—both here and most recently in Japan—ignoring seismic perils doesn’t make them go away, and the price for such ignorance has been in the billions of dollars. Concerned ratepayers should support the Alliance for Nuclear Responsibility in making sure state regulators hold PG&E’s feet to the fire.
Arnold’s Bad Budget

great interest in California’s energy needs.
We must reverse this course or...
Cambria

Cambria CSD decided to try to put a desalination subsurface intake on the beach at the mouth of the creek. With no comprehensive answers available, an ad hoc citizen science inquiry was initiated, entailing creek sediment sample collection and testing, which yielded findings of mercury in four creek locations, a mile or closer to the beach. Most startling was a sample that found mercury at 540 parts per billion in one location at the mouth of the creek.

The Santa Lucia Chapter stepped up to the plate and backed this citizen-reporter’s investigation — both in principle and financially — in pursuing further testing to see if bioavailable and highly toxic methylmercury was part of that total mercury. The tests came back positive for 3 parts per billion methylmercury.

That doesn’t sound like much until one learns how damaging minute quantities of methylmercury can be, because it biomagnifies as it moves from one organism to the next in the food chain. Methylmercury found in sediments often indicates the presence of concentrations 10 to 90 times greater in the surrounding biota, due to its high solubility and bio-availability.

In the California Ocean Plan for Water Quality Control, the Regional Water Board has rules for discharges, with water quality objectives, limiting concentrations for mercury that are expressed in fractions of a part per billion. When asked about these limits, Dominic Roques of the RWQCB said they refer to total mercury; there are no allowable discharge levels for methylmercury.

What would be in the discharge to the ocean if test wells, and then desalination, were to be pursued in this specific location in Cambria? This question also looms: Is the terminus of a creek that had almost three million pounds of liquid mercury extracted from a mine just five miles upstream a good place to put an intake for creating a drinking water supply? Viewing the awesome speed and force with which winter storm water makes its way down Santa Rosa Creek to the ocean, sweeping huge quantities of sediment with it, this observer thinks not.

After the January 5 meeting, CSD President Sanders was quoted in the Cambrian as saying that the district “has known about the mercury situation for years. But we need to put the data in a comprehensive form so the public knows how it was dealt with.”

One ratepayer opined that it will be interesting to see how the director most associated with desal squares that admission of prior knowledge with the requirement that district decisions be made in public meetings, based on information made known to the public in a timely manner. (President Sanders: What did you know and when did you know it?)

All of the January 5 testimony had the cumulative effect of decelerating the Board’s headlong rush, especially with ratepayers urging them to take time to reflect on all the information presented in public comment. Ultimately, after two recesses and a conference with counsel, the Cambria CSD Board decided against approving the CEQA exemption, and instead voted to direct staff to commence, per CEQA, an initial study for the project. The further consideration of the course of the test wells project was deferred until their regular January 21 Board meeting. The Public prevailed for the day.

The CSDS has sent out a Notice of Intent to adopt a Negative Declaration for the test well drilling/installation project. Apparently abandoning their quest for CEQA exemption, the Cambria CSD seeks to press forward by still asserting, now in a Negative Declaration, that there will be no significant impacts from 7 to 10 test wells on Santa Rosa Creek State Beach, with tens of thousands of pounds of equipment lumbering over the beach, drilling and pumping from multiple wells up to 150 feet deep.

For that study, everyone can be glad that there seems to be no problem with mercury in the SR-4 well near Santa Rosa Creek, which provides drinking water (and which could providing potential relief for concerns about a water shortage for current ratepayers). However, what’s in the depths of a well does not address the problem with surface and water sediment contaminations from past and present mercury mine impacts. It seems ill advised to draw false comfort by essentially comparing apples to oranges. A fuller investigation of the mercury issue than is called for in the Negative Declaration would appear to be in the best interests of public health and safety and seems prudent before disturbing sediments that could have negative impacts on this coastal ecosystem. The precautionary principle surely applies here. (Go to the Science and Environmental Health Network website, www.sean.org — a wonderful website for the concept of guardianship and stewardship into the future.)

The Measure of Anne McMahon

There are any number of ways to take the measure of a person, but two seem to be most telling on a human scale:

Do people smile and immediately feel better when they see that person coming?

And

Does that person, through his or her everyday example, in small acts and large, when people are looking and when they’re not, cause the rest of us to understand that we need to be better people?

For Anne McMahon, for our Annie, anyone who was blessed by knowing her knows what the answer is.

And also knows that without her there is less, now, to smile about.

And we also know that to finish (will there ever be an end point?) what Annie was doing, the rest of us will have to be better — kinder, gentler, more compassionate, more persistent, more understanding, than we usually are.

-Sarah Christie

Our Annie

point in her life in that way is the most humbling gift I have ever received.

For the rest of my days, I will always look at landscapes, seascapes and skies with Annie’s eyes. I want to appreciate the world every day as a better place for her having been here.

-Sarah Christie

- Bud Laurent
Got Graywater if You Want It

The Sierra Club has on hand a limited supply of *The San Luis Obispo Guide to the Use of Graywater*, the new manual produced by the Appropriate Technology Coalition -- SLO Green Build, the Santa Lucia Chapter of the Sierra Club and the San Luis Bay Chapter of Surfrider.

Graywater systems turn a waste product that can comprise up to 80% of residential wastewater into a valuable resource for irrigation and other non-potable uses. Harvesting graywater to meet your non-potable water needs utilizes an appropriate technology that can recover initial costs quickly. No permit required.

$10 each, while supplies last. E-mail kim.sierraclub@gmail.com, or call (805) 543-8717 to reserve your copy.
Outings and Activities Calendar

All 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 Chair Joe Morris, 772-1875. For information on a specific outing, please call the outing leader.

Sat., Feb. 6th, 9:30 a.m. Bishop Peak Exploration Hike with Mike Simms. Visit several of our Central Coast environments from oak woodlands to the sage scrub to the chaparral on one hike. Just 5.4 miles takes us around Peak Loop, up to the top of Bishop peak and back to Patricia Drive. There are a few steep parts and sturdy shoes are recommended but this hike will be at a moderate pace. Approximately 1100 feet of elevation gain. Patricia Drive trailhead. Leader: Mike Simms, (805) 459-1701, msimms@aol.com. Non-members are encouraged to hike with us.

Sun., Feb. 7, 10 a.m., Islay Hill Open Space. Pole Cats is dedicated to leading local Sierra Club day hikes and modeling the benefits of using trekking poles. 1 mile/400 feet elevation change. Join us for a hike with spectacular views of Edna Valley and Morros. From Broad, go east on Tank Farm, turn right on Wavertree, left on Spanish Oaks and veer right onto Sweetbay and park near cul de sac. Confirm with David Georgi at 458-5575 or polecatleader@gmail.com for upcoming activities.

Sun., Feb. 7, 2010—Superbowl alternative hike and potluck: If bears, dolphins, and eagles just sound like animals to you, join us as we hike Point Sal Road to our potluck dinner destination (4 miles round trip, 1300 ft. elev. gain). Bring a daypack with food to share, as well as a plate, utensils, and water for yourself. Meet at the Orcutt CVS Drug's parking lot at 3 pm. Details: HM 937-6766. (Sponsored by the Arguello Group).

Mon-Wed, Feb. 15-17, Gold Butte Introductory Tour. Come explore this protected National Conservation Area in Southeast Nevada. See many beautiful and interesting sights, including petroglyphs and Joshua trees. Climb one of the areas peaks and enjoy the splendid views. Central Companion: Leader: Vicky Hoover, (415-977-5527), vickahoover@sierraclub.org. CNRCC Wilderness and Desert Committees.

Sat., Feb 20, 10 a.m., Maino Open Space trail/Lemon Grove Loop. Pole Cats is dedicated to leading local Sierra Club day hikes and modeling the benefits of using trekking poles. 2 miles/400 feet elevation change. The trailhead is located off the Marsh Street trailhead, just north of southbound Highway 101. From downtown SLO take Nipomo Street to the intersection with Marsh Street and proceed as if to take 101 South. Immediately after the underpass, bear right into the parking lot. Confirm with David Georgi at 458-5575 or polecatleader@gmail.com. Flipside welcome.

Sun., Feb. 21, 9 a.m., Hike the Barranca-Hidge Trail Loop. Join the leader on this late winter hike in Montana de Oro State Park. The hike will be about 8 miles with about 1800 ft. elevation gain. We will enjoy the backcountry of the park, great views from Hazard Peak, and possibly some early wildflowers. Ticks and poison oak possible. Meet at Bidge Trailhead, 2.5 miles from the park entrance. Bring water, snacks, and dress for the weather. There is a good chance of a refreshing stop at a Los Osos eatery following the hike. For info, call Chuck at 805-441-7597.

Sat., Feb. 27, 10 a.m., Family Hike in Harmony Headlands State Park. Explore the newest of our state parks. Easy 4-mile roundtrip hike, socially paced, past creek, rolling hills, historic ranch house, down to bluff overlooking the ocean. Children visit the museum in Furnace Creek and take a two-mile hike to the highest sand dune. Possible hike into Mosaic Canyon. If you want to stay Sunday night, camp at Stovepipe Wells ($12/site). Contact Carol Wiley at desertlily101@verizon.net or call (760-245-8734). CNRCC Desert Committee.

Sat-Sun., March 13-14, Fence Removal, Hiking, Camp - Carrizo Plain. Help remove fences on the Dept. of Fish and Game Reserve. A wet winter means wildflowers! Work is a great way to meet new people and make friends. If you want to work with us, please bring your own sleeping gear and tent. Contact Pat Selby Camp on Friday night for those who want to arrive early. Leaders: Pat and Letty French, (805-239-7336). Prefer email: lettyfrench@gmail.com. Santa Lucia Chapter and CNRCC Desert Committee.

Sat-Sun., March 13-14, Ghost Town Extravaganza. Spectacular landscape near Death Valley; explore the ruins of California’s colorful past. Camp at the ghost town of Ballarat (flush toilets & hot showers). On Saturday, 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 St. Patty’s Day potluck feast and camp fire. On Sunday, a quick visit to the infamous Riley town site before heading home. Group size strictly limited. $58 per person (Sierra Club), 2 sage, H&W phones, email, rideshare info to logosa Gerard, P.O. Box 294726, Phelan, CA 92329; (760) 888-2179. CNRCC Desert Committee.

Island Hopping in Channel Islands National Park
May 7-9; Jul 16-19; Aug 6-9; Sep 10-12.
CA’s Channel Islands are Galapagos USA! Marvel at the wildlife of whales, seals, sea lions, rare birds & blazing wildflowers. Hike the wild, windswept trails. Kayak the rugged coastline. Snorkel in pristine waters. Discover remnants of the Chumash people who lived on these islands for thousands of years. Or just relax at sea. These 3 & 4-day “live aboard” fundraiser cruises are sponsored by the Angeles Chapter Political Committee & Sierra Club California Political Committee. Depart from Santa Barbara aboard the 68’ Truth, 5505 for May and Sep; $785 for July & August, 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 $300 check payable to Sierra Club to leaders Joan Jones Holtz & Don Holtz, 11326 The Wy E St., El Monte, CA 91732. Contact leaders for more information (626-441-0706); jholtzhd@aol.com.