Eat Food? Sign Here

Help get your right to know on the ballot

It’s time to require the labeling of genetically modified foods. Polls show that more than 80 percent of California voters want to know if their food was produced using genetic engineering—potatoes altered with bacteria genes, corn altered to produce pesticide, “super” pigs altered with human growth genes, tomatoes altered with fish genes, fish altered with cattle growth genes, etc.

But in the near future, you may suddenly start hearing arguments against your right to know what you’re eating. That’s because the Committee for the Right to Know, a grassroots coalition of consumer, public health and environmental organizations and food companies in California, has submitted the California Right to Know Genetically Engineered Food Act to the State Attorney General for circulation as an initiative measure. Proponents have until April 12 to obtain the 504,760 valid signatures needed to qualify the initiative for the November ballot. Of course, the industry-backed groups that will be making arguments against informing consumers and in favor of ignorance won’t put it that way. Locally, we may see an attempt to re-fight the battle over Measure Q, the 2004 ballot initiative that sought to ban the cultivation of genetically engineered crops in SLO County. But this initiative simply seeks the labeling of genetically engineered foods, aka genetically modified organisms (GMOs), so pulling out old arguments about taking away the right of farmers to choose to plant genetically engineered corn or soybeans won’t apply. This is about your right to choose what you put in your body.

You may hear arguments about the burdensome costs to industry of labeling (probably referred to as a “tax.”) Since consumer labeling is a long established, non-burdensome practice, this, too, won’t be much of an argument. You’ll hear the argument that there is simply no need to label GMOs because they are perfectly safe. But is simply no need to label GMOs you may hear arguments about taking away the right of farmers to choose to plant genetically engineered corn or soybeans won’t apply. This is about your right to choose what you put in your body.

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Truth and Consequences
The blog of Sierra Club Executive Director Michael Brune

It’s another warm, dry, sunny day here in San Francisco today. Highs might hit 70 degrees. Temperatures are in the 80s in Los Angeles, with a high of 90 in Fullerton. It’s January 5.

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

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

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

The U.S. had major floods, too, but most of our weather-related natural disasters are impervious to data. Most of them won’t even admit that global climate disruption, carbon pollution, or the importance of moving beyond fossil fuels. They are impervious to data. Most of them won’t even admit that.

Change of Address?
Mail changes to:
85 Second Street, 2nd Floor
San Francisco, CA 94105-3441
or e-mail: address.changes@sierrclub.org

Donate to the Peter Douglas Coastal Fellowship Fund

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

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

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

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

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

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

SANTA LUCIAN
February 2012

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

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Our 2012 High School Eco-Grants Program is Accepting Applications

In 2012, the Santa Lucia chapter of the Sierra Club is awarding eco-grants of $150 to public and private high schools in SLO County for students’ group environmental projects. The application process has been kept deliberately simple. The deadline for applications is Tuesday, February 14th. Applications received after that date will be considered if funds are still available after the initial round of awards. Recipients will be notified and funds become available by March 1st.

The funds support special projects—ones that have not already been done routinely—that demonstrably benefit the local environment and/or environmental awareness and need support for success. Projects must be administered by a faculty member, who is also the primary author of the application. Funds will be payable to the school (or district, if preferred). Substantial involvement from at least five or more students in carrying out the project is expected. Student involvement in its design is a plus. A high school may submit several project proposals, but usually only one from each school can be funded, to maximize the number of schools able to participate. Proposals can come from any academic area, any level from 9th through 12th grades, or from a student group recognized within the school. They can take place on campus or in the community. A brief progress report (1-2 typed pages) is asked about the implementation of the project, submitted by June 1st. Projects should be completed by the end of the Spring semester or substantial progress made by that time. Contributions to the eco-grant fund are derived solely from individual contributions and are tax-deductible. Send a check made out to “The Sierra Club Foundation,” with “Santa Lucia Chapter eco-grants” on the memo line, to: Sierra Club, P.O. Box 15755, San Luis Obispo, CA 93406.

Eco-Grant Application

Please include the following information:

Part I: Identifying Data

Name of high school and street address.
Name of faculty sponsor, email address, and phone.
Description of student group (e.g., an academic class or earth club) who would do the project.

Part II: Project Description

500 words or less
Describe the nature of the project and how it might benefit the environment or awareness.
Describe the materials needed and their specific costs and budget.
Describe how the project will be carried out: the student and faculty activities.

Criteria for Acceptance of Proposals

On-time submission and clarity/specificity of the application.
Benefit to the environment and/or awareness.
Efficiency in use of funds (e.g., use of student-made rather than purchased materials; fundraising to partially offset costs).
Level and breadth of student involvement.
Demonstration of environmental understanding and creativity.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The CPUC has failed to hire a single seismologist, even though it was directed to independently review Diablo Canyon and San Onofre seismic studies before seeking license renewal. The concerns that arose in the wake of the San Bruno gas explosion and revelations about the CPUC and PG&E's negligent oversight are justifiably magnified when addressing California's aging—and seismically vulnerable—nuclear reactors. "San Bruno was tragic," said Alliance outreach coordinator David Weisman, "San Bruno plus radiation would be catastrophic."

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

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

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

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

My resolution for 2012 is to be naïve — dangerously naïve. I'm aware that the usual recipe for political effectiveness is just the opposite: to be cynical, calculating, an insider. But if you think, as I do, that we need deep change in this country, then cynicism is a sucker's bet. Try as hard as you can, you're never going to be as cynical as the corporations and the harem of politicians they pay for. It's like trying to outchant a Buddhist monastery.

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

For example, when he said that "their failure to properly advise the IPR members thereof requires immediate correction," that seemed an eminently reasonable course to follow, even if it was also eminently political.

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

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

As important as the vote total in the House, however, was another number: within minutes of the vote, Oil Change International said that more than half a million Americans offered public comments against the pipeline, the most on any energy project in the nation's history.

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

Buying Congress

I know that cynics — call them realists, if you prefer — will be completely unsurprised by this. But I'm still a romantic, precisely the opposite.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Two thousand miles north of here, in the quiet, wind swept waters of the Arctic, the gregarious talkative white whales are exhibiting breast cancer. The decline of Beluga Whales is attributed in large part to Polychlorinated Biphenyls (PCBs) being concentrated in their tissues through bio-accumulation. PCBs are extremely persistent and accumulate in living organisms, from microbes to human breast milk. Many studies have found confirmed that human breast milk has four to ten times the amount of PCBs than in the mothers’ blood. PCBs have been linked to lower IQ and the rest soaked into the concrete, down into the storm drain that year. The entire block lost its electrical service. The neighbor repaired old leaking PCB-containing transformers with his bare hands. The neighbor returned to the FDA in 2009, where he now presides as the FDA’s own scientists. The doctrine of substantial equivalence, specifically the “no further testing required” version of it, was in large part the brainchild of one Michael R. Taylor, a former lawyer for Monsanto, the world’s largest producer of genetically engineered seeds and herbicides for the crops grown from them. In 1991, Taylor became a deputy commissioner at the FDA long enough to have genetically engineered foods declared “substantially equivalent” to their conventional counterparts, thereby sparing his former employer the expense and hassle of the lengthy testing that is normally required for new food products. Having thus secured billions of dollars in profit for Monsanto by allowing their products to be rushed to market, Taylor returned to the company, where he was named a vice president. (In his latest pass through the regulatory revolving door, Taylor returned to the FDA in 2009, where he now presides as the nation’s food safety czar.)

Obviously, action at the federal level on labeling genetically engineered food is unlikely. Federal labeling legislation has been before Congress since 1999. It has failed to pass. State governments have likewise failed. GMO labeling bills launched in Sacramento and in fourteen other states have died, testimony to the power of the ag biotech industry and its lobbyists. California’s ballot initiative process was designed for situations just like this, as a tool that allows the voters to implement the will of the people and go around the entrenched money interests when those interests have paralyzed our legislature. In the last year, the USDA approved five new GMO crops from Monsanto. In December, the Obama administration quietly approved two brand new Monsanto GMO seeds. That’s why, when you are approached by someone with a clip board at a farmers market or outside a grocery store and asked if you would like to sign a petition to put the California Right to Know Genetically Engineered Food Act on the ballot, you should say yes. We don’t have time to wait to ensure the safety of food for California families.

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

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

Eat food?
continues from page 1

mounting evidence of adverse environmental and health effects. That experiment is being conducted despite sharp dissent with the FDA’s position that there is essentially no difference between GMOs and conventional crops and therefore no need for extensive testing – a dissent coming from the Union of Concerned Scientists, the UK Medical Research Council, the Royal Society of Canada, the American Academy of Environmental Medicine and the FDA’s own scientists. The doctrine of substantial equivalence, specifically the “no further testing required” version of it, was in large part the brainchild of one Michael R. Taylor, a former lawyer for Monsanto, the world’s largest producer of genetically engineered seeds and herbicides for the crops grown from them. In 1991, Taylor became a deputy commissioner at the FDA long enough to have genetically engineered foods declared “substantially equivalent” to their conventional counterparts, thereby sparing his former employer the expense and hassle of the lengthy testing that is normally required for new food products. Having thus secured billions of dollars in profit for Monsanto by allowing their products to be rushed to market, Taylor returned to the company, where he was named a vice president. (In his latest pass through the regulatory revolving door, Taylor returned to the FDA in 2009, where he now presides as the nation’s food safety czar.)

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Taking Issue

problematic environmental coverage & commentary in our local media


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

“I appear to have neglected to insure the sacred site is protected, as required by the LCP [Local Coastal Plan]... In addition, it appears that the City has not explored options for avoiding development on the site, as required by LCP Policy 407.”

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

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

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

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

STORY: Californians must make big shift to electric power to meet long-term energy goals.

The City should require an updated butterfly survey conducted at the appropriate time of year to inform the determination as to whether ESHA (Environmentally Sensitive Habitat Area) for monarch butterflies is located. The project must be sited and designed to minimize any impacts on adjacent ESHA including the impacts caused by placing residence and human activity in close proximity to wildlife habitat. Because the City has not made a determination as to whether the site contains ESHA, and has not identified such ESHA on a map, it appears the City does not have the necessary information to evaluate the project for consistency with the certified LCP.

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

Get more nuclear plants to meet climate goals, state told

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

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

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

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


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

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

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

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

Though “indiscriminate” anti-environmental riders on appropriation bills were a major threat to environmental protections, the media didn’t bother to report the reason. The push to gut environmental regulations and fatten the profits of Big Oil and major polluters.

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Multiple anti-environmental riders were attached to end-of-the-year spending bills. One of the Republican riders that held up the payroll tax cut extender bill required the President to decide the fate of the controversial Keystone XL pipeline within 60 days, despite the fact that environmental review would take at least a year. Another rider sought to kill health safeguards for toxic pollutants from industrial boilers and incinerators — some of the largest industrial sources of toxic air pollutants such as mercury and arsenic.

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

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

“...The poison crib: When protective chemicals harm. Scientists have new evidence of the dangers of flame retardants and their potential damage, especially on kids,” By Sheila Kaplan, Eden.com, Jan. 10, 2010.

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

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

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

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

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

"We don't necessarily know what that water supply project is at this point, whether it's desal or something else, quite frankly. So to do that, they need to gather data to define the alternatives that will be analyzed."

Coastal Commission staff knew better, and immediately refuted Gresens' "we don't necessarily know" gambit, replying "Staff fully expect that the Commission will see a proposal for a desal facility rather than just water supply options. Last year, in September, the Corps issued two contracts that specifically are for environmental analyses for a desalination facility, and a design for a desalination facility. The Corps' construction list for projects in 2013 includes the Cambria desalination facility."

It was not the first time the CCSD had tried and failed to get away with a strategy of deliberate vagueness at the end of the talk, followed by a siting and construction of which was the obvious goal of the survey project. For that and other reasons, many of which were to be heard again five years later when the CCSD tried again at another state beach, that was that: Permit denied.

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

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**Footwear in the News**

UC Wildlife Research Team Seeks Single Socks

**by UC ANR NEWS**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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**Mushrooms in the Garden**

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

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

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

Dennis shares his enthusiasm for nature with students of all ages, and regularly teaches about nature and biology. He can be contacted at dennissher@slbglobal.net. Additional information about the garden and its non-members. For more information, contact Kristina Van Wert at (805) 541-1400 ext. 305 or volunteers@slgb.org.
Bike Month 2010 Image Design Competition

You can design the 2012 Bike Month logo

San Luis Obispo Regional Rideshare invites artists, designers and community members to submit works for the 3rd Annual Bike Month Image Design Competition. Bike Month, a local celebration occurring annually in May, encourages the use of bicycle transportation through a variety of free community events. The winning design will act as a guiding force behind Bike Month vision and bicycling festivities, encouraging San Luis Obispo County to spend more time in the bike lane and less time behind the steering wheel.

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

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

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

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

Thank You for Celebrating

Our Annual fund-raising Celebration of Environmental Literature, Music and Art at SLO’s King David Masonic Temple was a smash. Attendees were held rapt by readings of two of our region’s most distinguished authors, Vicki Leon and Catherine Ryan Hyde, the cello and guitar virtuosity of Barbara Lee and Andrew Healy, and a presentation on plein air painting by Douglas Stenhouse. In addition to the incredible vibes and Mr. Stenhouse and his fellow painters as highlighted in our January issue, which made the event a visual delight, we like to thank the businesses and individuals whose donations of goods and services made our silent auction and dinner a success — including the local wineries who kept spirits high by keeping the spirits flowing:

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

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

Swallows Getting Respect in Avila

by Shirley Goetz

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

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

Elsewhere in town, however, the visible outlines of completed nests on the walls of homes are evidence that the swallows have repeatedly failed to install preventive netting. I have been a witness to one resident, along with several friends, after dusk destroying a completed nest with live chicks inside. I will attempt to contact the homeowner with information on netting installation, swallows and the law.

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

My gripe is that the birds, after management sees they’re trapped, are not released. I realize the netting is in place to prevent the birds from nesting or pooping on patrons of the store, but in the event of birds getting inside the netting, they are left to die and rot in the nets. They decompose, and holes and feathers fall through the netting onto the sidewalk. I wish they would show more compassion and let the birds out. I have complained several times to the store management, but my complaints have fallen on deaf ears. Too sad.

Taking the stage Vicki Leon prepares to read from “4000 Years of Uplifted Women.”

PCBs continued from page 5

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

The Redwood Chapter of the Sierra Club is asking the public to file a formal complaint of any past leaking or exploding pole mounted utility transformers near or at their homes or places of businesses, no matter how long ago, to the California Department of Toxic Substances Control website www.dtsc.ca.gov/database/CalIPPA/Complaint. Please keep alert and pass the word. The singing giants of the north seas deserve better.
Coastal Commission vote generally occurs only when new information has come to light that was not known to the applicant at the time of the original hearing, their request was denied. Then the CCSD went rogue. In 2008, the District conducted ground-penetrating radar studies at Santa Rosa Beach — “without necessary Coastal Development Permits or landowner approvals,” as noted by Coastal Commission staff — and transferred responsibility for the project to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. This maneuver took the project out to the applicant at the time of the decision could still render judgment on whether the site is infeasible for the Coastal Act.

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

The CCSD should also check out the 2009 report “Making Every Drop Count: Increasing Water Efficiency in California’s Commercial, Industrial and Institutional Sector,” available on line from the Natural Resources Defense Council. A 1997 State of California study contrasted the existing cost of water deliveries ($395 to $390 per acre foot) to the expected price of desalination ($1,300 to $2,700). In 2008, the nation’s first large-scale ocean desalination plant came on-line in Tampa Bay, Florida, generating 5 million gallons of freshwater every day. But the project was years behind schedule and many millions of dollars over budget, problems that also seem to be on the horizon for planned San Francisco/Marin County and San Diego desalination plants.

Owners of the San Diego plant — still in the planning stages for more than a decade — have stated an intention to sell water for $950 per acre foot (compared with $700 per acre foot commonly paid by local agencies, according to the Wall Street Journal). Tampa Bay sells its desalinated water for $1,100 per acre foot, but outside analyses have estimated the true costs of producing water at $1,500 per acre foot for Tampa Bay, $2,600 for San Diego, and $2,700 for San Francisco/Marin County. Prices this high call into question the affordability of desalination in comparison to other methods of balancing the Southwest’s water use with its water supply.
Classifieds

Next issue deadline is February 14.
To get a rate sheet or submit your ad and payment, contact:
Sierra Club - Santa Lucia Chapter
P.O. Box 15755
San Luis Obispo, CA 93406
sierraclub8@gmail.com

Les Kangas
Solar Energy Consultant
REC Solar, Inc.
775 Fiero Lane, Suite 200
San Luis Obispo, CA 93401
Office: (805) 528-9705
Cell: (805) 305-7164
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A Will is a Way
Make a commitment to the next generation by remembering the Sierra Club in your will. Your support will help others preserve the intricate balance of nature.
Contact: John Calvary
Director of Gift Planning at (805) 927-6930 or email pablo.sand@sierraclub.org

Hold Your Water
“Slow it, sink it, spread it” is the mantra of enlightened water managers who know that water works best when it stays on the land where it falls.
Now that mantra can be yours, too, along with healthier soils, happier wildlife, and reductions in your water bill, thanks to the tips and techniques in Rainwater Management for Low Impact Development, a publication of the Appropriate Technology Coalition -- SLO Green Build, the Santa Lucia Chapter of the Sierra Club and the Surfrider Foundation, available for $10 postage paid, while supplies last. Mail your check to Sierra Club, P.O. Box 15755, SLO 93406.
Outings and Activities Calendar

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

For information on a specific outing, please call the listed outing leader.

Sat., Feb. 4th, 9 a.m. Southern Big Sur Coastal Hike Exploring the Silver Peak Wilderness. Explore Villa Creek and Alder Creek Drainage on 9-mile moderately strenuous hike with 2,400 foot elevation gain and loss. We will start out on the Cruikshank Trail to Upper Cruikshank Camp, head north on Buckeye Trail crossing Villa Creek, then climb to the ridge top above Alder Creek for a wonderful view and lunch. We expect to see early spring flowers. Bring lunch, water, non-slip hiking shoes and be prepared for varying weather conditions. Meet at the SLO Cal Poly Ropes Course (3103 Sycamore Road, Ridgecrest, CA, the Grass Valley Wilderness). Slightly east and south of Ridgecrest, CA, the Grass Valley Wilderness was created in 1994. It features rolling hills and a few higher rock outcroppings. As it is no longer available for grazing, we will join a group of college age SCA interns in removing old fence poles and disguising an illegal road. Saturday and Sunday are for work, and Monday, President’s Day, will be reserved to hike and explore the Wilderness. This is an opportunity to combine car camping, day hiking, exploring, and service in a relatively unknown wilderness. Leader: Craig Deutsche; 310-477-6670, craig.deutsche@gmail.com, CNRRC Desert Committee.

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

Sun., Feb. 12th, 1 p.m. Guided Walk of Mission-Era San Luis Obispo. Do you know where SLO’s first doctor lived, the location of the “hanging tree,” or the building that may be the oldest in the state? Find out and much more on an easy roundtrip hike into scenic Cal Poly Canyon to ephore the creative structures built by past students, duration about 1 1/2 hrs. Meet at H4 Parking lot, corner of N. Perimeter Rd. and Village Dr. Bring water, sturdy shoes, and dress in layers for the weather. Rain or threat of rain cancels. Info: Stuart Weickgenant, 760-519-8180 Asst.: Joe Morris.

Sun. Feb. 26th, 10 a.m., Islay Hill Open Space PoleCats is dedicated to leading local Sierra Club day hikes and modeling the benefits of using trekking poles — 1 mile/400 feet elevation change. Join us for a hike with spectacular views of Edna Valley to the south and morros to the north. From Broad, go east on Tank Farm Rd. and Village Dr. Bring water, sturdy shoes, and dress in layers for the weather. Rain or threat of rain cancels. Info: Stuart Weickgenant, 760-519-8180 Asst.: Joe Morris.

For the most up-to-date listing of activities, please check the web page www.santalucia.sierraclub.org, and the most up-to-date listing of activities, please check the web page www.santalucia.sierraclub.org.

Santa Lucian • February 2012